SEPT.

Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

25¢

RED STAR MAGAZINE SEPT.

Sensational Novel of the Future

A BRAND NEW WORLD" BY Ray Cummings

ALSO AN EXCITING NOVELET OF SUPERNATURAL ADVENTURE

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Pityrosporum ovale, the strange "bottle bacillus" regarded by many leading authorities as a causative agent of infectious dandruff.

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Listerine to guard against INFECTIOUS DANDRUFF!

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Listerine Antiseptic kills millions of germs on your scalp and hair, including Pityrosporum ovale the strange "bottle bacillus" that many authorities consider a causative agent of infectious dandruff.

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Listerine Antiseptic

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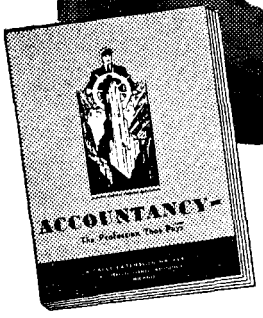

Accounting faces an unusual situation during this war period. The need and demand for accountants—both beginners and experts—is increasing while the supply is diminishing. That spells opportunity for many—perhaps for you.

The reason is simple.

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Industry needs more accountants. New plants, enlarged plants, conversion to war production, more government regulations and reports, taxes, priorities, etc. —all call for more and better records.

This need will persist and increase all during the war—it will open many, many fine jobs, fine both in responsibility and pay. Nor will it end sharply with peace—it will continue through the difficult post-war adjustment period.

Yet many present accountants are going into the armed services. Their places and the calls for more accountants can only be filled by new men and women coming into accounting and coming quickly.

Can You Grasp This Opportunity?

That depends largely on you.

The opportunity is open most directly to women and to men not called to service (although we know of our accounting students given specialized duty and ranking in the army and navy).

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Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

(Combined with Fantastic Novels Magazine)

Vol. IV | SEPTEMBER, 1942 | No. 5

Complete Book-Length Novel

A Brand New World — Ray Cummings — 6

Invaders from Xenephrene! Armed with terrible weapons they land upon an Earth that is struggling to adjust itself to a new and demoralizing climatic upheaval!

Published serially in The Argosy All-Story Weekly, September 22, 1928

Novelet

Wild Wullie, the Waster — Tod Robbins — 114

A favorite Scottish weird tale presented upon the request of many of our readers who greatly enjoyed the original publication of this "different" story

From The All-Story Weekly, February 14, 1920

Short Story

The Horla — Guy de Maupassant — 129

(Translated by George Allan England)

"Still we gaze entranced and, like the child shuddering through weirdly peopled shadows to his solitary chamber, we are conscious of the uncanny spell and the spectral realm in which we move"

Originally published in The Scrap Book, June, 1911

Features

Ariel's Song from "The Tempest" — Illustrated by Virgil Finlay — 113

The Readers' Viewpoint — 138

This magazine is published once a month. The October issue will be on sale August 14.

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Other RED STAR *Magazines*

ARGOSY • FLYNN'S DETECTIVE • ALL-STORY LOVE • RAILROAD MAGAZINE
LOVE CRIME DETECTIVE

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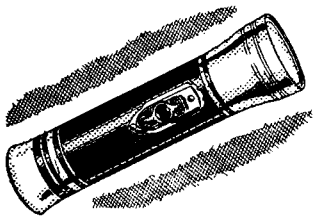
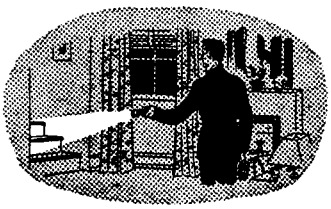
WHEN and HOW to Use Your FLASHLIGHT in a BLACKOUT

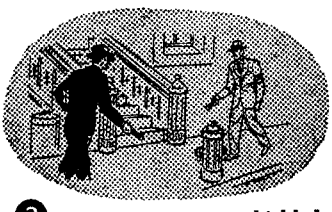
THESE INSTRUCTIONS Reviewed and Passed by the OFFICE OF CIVILIAN DEFENSE



1 EVERY HOME should have one or more flashlights! But before buying *new* ones, inspect and repair your *old* ones. They may need only a new bulb, new lens or fresh batteries.



2 KEEP YOUR FLASHLIGHT in a convenient, accessible place —and *always* in its place. When using it INDOORS, never point it toward unshielded windows, skylights or open doors.



3 DO NOT USE an *unshielded* flashlight OUTDOORS in a blackout except when absolutely necessary. Keep the beam level or downward—never point it even *slightly* upward. And never point it toward highly reflective surfaces.

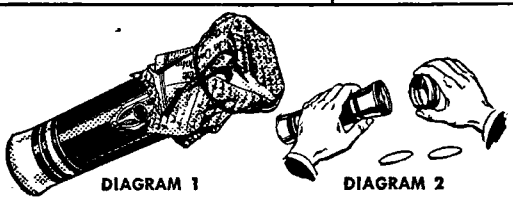


DIAGRAM 1 DIAGRAM 2

4 HERE'S HOW TO SHIELD your flashlight for outdoor use: Cover lens with two thicknesses of newspaper or similar paper, held in place by string, as in Diagram 1. OR, cut two discs of paper and insert under lens, as in Diagram 2. Deep red paper may also be used (blue is unsatisfactory). **CAUTION: The Office of Civilian Defense has not yet approved any so-called "blackout lights."** To be safe, follow the instructions given here, *until further instructions are issued.*

KEEP FLASHLIGHTS LOADED with fresh batteries, and have an extra set on hand for your light in case of long-continued use.

THE FOREGOING INSTRUCTIONS ARE PUBLISHED FOR YOUR AID AND GUIDANCE

We hope you will never meet with an emergency, but if you do, we hope you will have *fresh* "Eveready" batteries in your flashlight, because we know they will not fail you. Fresh, DATED "Eveready" batteries last longer.

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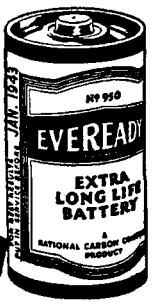

FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... *Look for the* **DATE-LINE**

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Who was this tattered, frostbitten figure whose star was predestined to dimout that of Hitler by its blazing brilliance?

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SEPTEMBER ISSUE OF

ARGOSY

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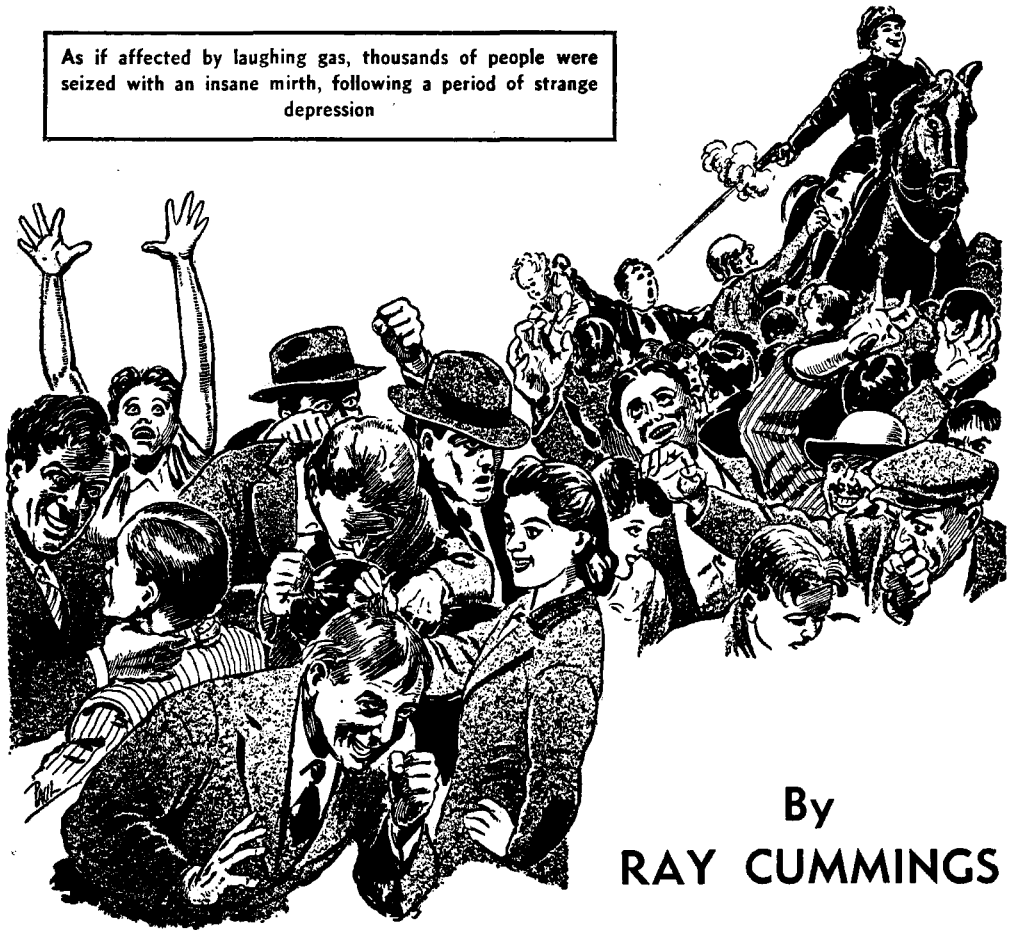
As if affected by laughing gas, thousands of people were seized with an insane mirth, following a period of strange depression



By
RAY CUMMINGS

A Brand New World

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF THE WORLD

THE new Star was first observed on the night of October 4, 1952, reported by the Clarkson Observatory, near London. A few hours later the observers at Washington saw it also; and still later, it was found and identified as unknown upon one of the photographic plates of the great refracting telescope of Flagstaff, Arizona. By observers at Table Mountain, Cape Town, and the observatory near Buenos Aires, it was not seen, for it was in the northern heavens.

The affair brought a brief mention in the Amalgamated Broadcasters' report the next day; and the newspapers carried a few lines of it on their back pages. Nothing more.

I handled the item. My name is Peter Vanderstuyft. I was twenty-three years old, that autumn of 1952, a newsgatherer

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This story appeared originally in The Argosy All-Story Weekly, beginning serialization September 22, 1928

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A new planet in the solar system! And in its wake come mystery, danger — and a most amazing confusion

A world gone mad! Actions were aimless, horror and suicides were spreading everywhere! And always that terrible laughter. . . . What would happen to the human race?

for the Amalgamated Broadcasters, attached to the New York City headquarters. The item meant nothing to me. It was the forerunner—the significant, tiny beginning—of the most terrible period of the history of the earth; but I did not know that. I tossed it over to Freddie Smith, who was with me in the office that night.

"Father's staff has found a new star—wonderful!"

But Freddie's freckled face did not answer my grin. For once his pale blue eyes were solemn. "Professor Vanderstuyft phoned me from Washington awhile ago. It sure seems queer."

"What's queer?" I demanded.

Then he grinned. "Nope. Your father says you'd sell your soul for a news item. When we've got anything important to tell the world—we'll tell you."

"Go wrap up an electric spark," I informed him.

He grinned again and went back to studying his interminable blue prints—his "thermodyne principle," as he called it, for a new heat-ray motor. Father was financing him for the patents and working model. Freddie was father's assistant in the Washington Observatory. But he

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was off duty now in New York arranging for the manufacture of his model.

This was in October. I was tremendously busy. A sensational murder case developed, and I was sent out to Indiana to cover it. A woman had presumably murdered her husband and a couple of children, but it looked as though she were going to be acquitted.

She was a handsome woman, and a good talker. She was taking full advantage of the new law regarding free speech, and every night from the jail she was broadcasting little talks to the public.

OCTOBER passed; and then November, and still I had not been able to get back to New York. Freddie occupied my rooms there, busy with his invention; father was at his post in Washington, and my sister Hulda was in Porto Rico, visiting our friends the Cains. Our plans —father's and mine—were to join the Cains and Hulda in Porto Rico for Christmas.

Father was leaving the Washington Observatory to assume charge of the Royal Dutch Astronomical Bureau, which had just completed an observatory in extreme Southern Chile, with the largest telescope in the world soon to be installed there. Freddie Smith was going with him as his assistant; and the A. B. Association had appointed me their representative, to live down there also.

None of these plans worked out, however. Christmas approached, and I was still engaged in Indiana with this accursed broadcasting murderess. And father wired me that he was too busy in Washington to leave.

During all these weeks there had been continual items in the news concerning the new star—issued by father's Washington staff, and by most of the observatories of the northern hemisphere. Father is a queer character; the Holland blood in us makes us phlegmatic, silent, and cautious—characteristics which apply more to father than to me. He is a true scientist, calmly judicial, unwilling to judge anything, or form any decisive opinion, without every possible fact before him.

Thus it was that during those weeks, neither Hulda in Porto Rica, nor myself had an intimation from father of the startling things he was learning. As he said finally, of what use to worry us until he was sure? Like the public in general, I became aware of conditions gradually. A news item here and there—items growing more insistent as the weeks passed, but still all crowded aside to make room for the sensational murder trial.

I recall some of the items. The new Star was approaching the general region of our solar system with extraordinary velocity. A star of the fortieth magnitude. Then they said it was the thirtieth. Soon it was visible to the naked eye. I remember reading one account, not long after the star's discovery, in which its spectrum was reported to be sunlight! Our own solar spectrum! Reflected sunlight! This was no distant, gigantic, incandescent star blazing with its own light. It was not large and far away, but small and close. As small as our own earth, and already it was within the limits of our solar system. A dark globe, like our earth, or the moon, or Venus and Mars—dark and solid, shining only by reflected sunlight!

By mid-December, at a convention of astronomers held in London, the new world was named Xenephrene. Father went over in one of the mail planes and read his afterward famous paper, suggesting the name, and giving his calculation of the elements of the orbit of this new heavenly body. It was the most startling announcement which had yet been made, and for one newspaper edition it got the first page. And I was ordered to give nine minutes of broadcasting time to it.

"Xenephrene" was a globe not quite, but very nearly as large as the earth. It had come whirling in like a comet from the star-filled regions of outer space; presumably like a comet to encircle our sun and then, with a hyperbolic orbit, to depart from us forever.

It had come visually into our northern heavens, and crossed the earth's orbit on the opposite side of the sun from us. It encircled the sun—this was in December—made its turn between the orbits of Mercury and Venus, and now was supposedly departing.

BUT according to father's calculation of its new orbital elements, it was not about to depart! Its orbit had become an ellipse—a very nearly circular ellipse similar to those of Venus and the earth! A new planet—a brand new world

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—had joined our little solar family! A world only a fraction smaller than Venus and the earth; larger than Mercury, larger than Mars. An interior planet, its orbit would be within that of the earth —between the earth and Venus.

On this date, December 20—so ran father's announcement—Xenephrene was proceeding in its elliptical orbit, and the earth was in advance of it. We could see Xenephrene in the sky now—any one could see it who cared to look. It was no more than thirty million miles from us now. A new morning and evening star, which at times far outshone Venus.

See it indeed! Xenephrene, the magnificent! For weeks it had been visible throughout its erratic course as from the great unknown realms of outer space it swam into our ken. During October and November it had been visually too near the sun—and too far away as yet—to be much of a spectacle. But I saw it in early December—a morning star it was then—just before dawn, rising in the eastern sky. A glowing purple spot of light, blazing like a great sapphire in the pale gray-blue of the dawn.

Xenephrene, the new world! I stood gazing up at it, and a flood of romance surged over me. A new world, strange, mysterious, beautiful! I had occasion several times during those terrible, fearsome days which so soon were to come to all of us on earth, to recall my fleeting mood of romance at first sight of Xenephrene. Mysterious globe! Romantic! How well could I have added—sinister!

What the scientists were thinking and doing during these weeks of December, 1952, and January, 1953, I did not know until later. Their fears—gropings—unceasing labor to verify their dawning suspicion of the truth—they withheld from the public. Until father's culminating discovery, which on February 10, 1953, he made public.

Christmas that winter was a depressing time for all of us. I think, everywhere in the world, a sense of ominous depression was gradually spreading. A great catastrophe impending, even though unheralded, must inevitably cast its forerunning shadow. I know I felt depressed. Away from father and Hulda —alone out there in Indiana on my job, with father inexplicably too busy to let me join him.

Hulda's Christmas letter from Porto Rico was depressing:

> Miserable winter. Peter, it's positively cold. Imagine—we had it 54 degrees yesterday. In Porto Rico! Mrs. Cain says we wish you'd keep your icy blasts of the north to yourself.

Trying to be jocular, but Hulda, too, was depressed that Christmas. It was indeed a miserable winter. Extraordinarily cold, everywhere. For a week or two, the papers had been commenting upon it. Zero weather around New York and all out through Indiana to Chicago. A succession of gray, snowy days—gray afternoons with the twilight seeming to come in mid afternoon. And at nearly eight o'clock in the morning it was still the twilight of dawn. The newspapers commented on that, jocularly remarking that the weather man was making our winter days very short this year.

The weather, in truth, was so abnormal that it occasioned an increasing newspaper comment. Even by Christmas, Canada was enveloped by constant subzero temperatures, which occasionally swept down as far as Virginia with heavy snowfalls. Florida, in December, had its greatest freeze since 1888; damage to the fruit was enormous. In the West Indies, an unprecedented cool wave was experienced.

Everywhere in the north temperate zone was the same. And from South America we had the reverse reports. The summer in Rio and in Buenos Aires was unusually hot. Cape Town reported an abnormal spell; Australia and New Zealand were sweltering.

FOR every unexplained condition of annoyance something must be blamed. In the United States some enterprising feature man gathered the information that authorities considered the radio broadcasters were responsible for the bad weather. The World Press sent it out, and it was widely used.

Many persons—so it said—had addressed the Anglo-American Radio Commission and other governmental radio agencies stating that the myriads of ether waves—the "electric waves"—sent out by the broadcasting stations were the cause of the extreme weather conditions. The "ether" was disturbed, so it was claimed; who could say what dangerous floods, blizzards, torrid heat, wind storms, and icy blasts might not be caused if this radio condition were not checked? It was suggested that the world govern-

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ments take action to restrict the output of broadcasters.

Newspaper jealousy of us, of course! It had been growing for years, ever since those early days when we first engaged in the audible dissemination of news. Our organization now was prompt in repudiation. The Amalgamated Broadcasters Association appealed immediately to the Federated World Weather Bureaus.

Within a week we were enabled to broadcast that the weather bureau physicists were emphatic in their declaration that the weather could not be blamed on radio waves. In order to affect the weather, radio would have to exert an influence on temperature, humidity or barometric pressure—which emphatically it does not do. Even in radio laboratories where the waves are most intensely produced, there never has been any such recorded effect.

We also pointed out that in the past, freaks of weather were always complained of; the coldest day in the history of Washington, D.C., which this December of 1952 had almost but not quite equaled, was February 11th, 1899—which was long before there were any broadcasting stations.

Nor did any of this take into account the obvious fact that radio could scarcely be blamed for what seemed our abnormally short winter days. It was not fancy; it seemed an actual fact. And from the southern hemisphere reports gave reverse conditions. The days were growing unnaturally long; sunset and twilight extended abnormally far into the evening.

It occurred to me as strange that our A.B.A. never broadcasted a mention of this; that there were never any scientific, authoritative reports concerning it. Surely the scientists could determine with exactitude whether our sun were rising and setting at the times it should! They could, indeed! They could—and they were calculating it only too exactly! But, as I learned afterward, there was a world government censorship upon the whole subject.

This censorship was lifted on that memorable February 10, 1953, when father made his startling statement to the world.

On February 9th, my job in Indiana ended; the murderess was acquitted amid applause and public rejoicing. But the verdict only held a divided first-page place now with the planet Xenephrene. The new world had steadily been nearing the earth; it was now only twenty-odd million miles away—a magnificent, startling spectacle, a purple point of light blazing near the sun; with the naked eye it appeared twice the size of any star.

In the afternoon of February 9th, Freddie phoned me from New York. I had never heard his voice so oddly solemn.

"Peter, your father wants you to come to Washington at once."

"What's up?" I demanded.

"Nothing. He wants to see you and me. You come to New York—join me here—leave to-day. Will you?"

"Yes," I agreed. "I'm through out here, fortunately."

"I'll wait for you here at your place. I wouldn't try the planes, if I were you—not with storms like this—"

"No," I said. "Besides, they're jammed since the railroads are hung up."

"Wait your chance—come by train, it's—safer."

He was so oddly solemn! It wasn't like Freddie Smith to bother about safety—a dare-devil, if there ever was one. But he was right about the planes; the surest way to get to New York at the moment was to take it slowly.

FOR a week the whole northeastern United States had been locked in the grip of a blizzard. The railroads were hung up; the strain of traffic, and the fearful weather had been too much for the passenger planes. Every one was jammed; and several failed to get through and were stalled in the storm along the way. But the railroads now were getting their tracks cleared; service was improving.

"I'll see you to-morrow," I told Freddie.

"Yes," he said. "I've got our accommodations on board the Congressional. Get here if you can."

I got through, and we took the Congressional Limited that February 10th for Washington. New York City was an almost unprecedented sight that dark-gray afternoon we left. A snowbound Canadian city it might have been by its appearance. A heavy, silent fall of snow; thick, soft, pure-white flakes.

The north wind of the past few days had died away. The snow sifted almost vertically down between the canyons of buildings. Without a wind, the afternoon

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seemed only moderately cold. Freddie and I passed a street thermometer at the corner where we had gone to join our taxi, which could not get into the cross-street. The temperature was five below zero.

Freddie caught my expression. He said, "This isn't New York cold. Can't you tell the difference? This is the cold of the north," still with that oddly solemn voice.

Our taxi with its clanking chains rumbled its way down Broadway and across Thirty-Fourth Street to the Pennsylvania Station. I had never seen Broadway like this. A white street, piled with soft, white snow which covered up its familiar configurations, buried its curbs, leveled street and pedestrian walks into one flat white surface. A strange Broadway; featureless, blankly expressionless, like a man's face without hair or eyebrows.

There was little traffic. Pedestrians in a crowd tramped the street's center. In the still cold the snow creaked and crunched under their tread. A few enterprising sleighs, brought down these past weeks from upstate, went by us loaded with people. The crowd was laughing, shouting.

At the shop windows, almost closed in by huge piles of snow left over from the storm of the week before, disconsolate proprietors gazed out from under the shadow of the overhead pedestrian levels. Three o'clock in the afternoon; the street lights were all winking on, turning the pure white of the snow a pale lurid green with their glare.

The crowd seemed taking it like a holiday, gay with shouts of laughter as it romped and shoved its way through the drifts. But there was no laughter within me. "The cold of the north," Freddie had said. It brought me a vague shudder.

"Look there." Freddie pointed to the second level at Forty-Second Street. At a department store entrance crowds were coming out and going in. A huge sign in moving electric lights gave the information that here Canadian winter equipment could be purchased. And as I gazed, a man in gaudy flannel costume of brilliant colors came from the store entrance. An advertisement, no doubt. He swung out to the pedestrian level on skiis; poised, and came sliding gracefully down the incline to the main street level, amid shouts and applause from the crowd.

We humans adjust ourselves very quickly to new conditions. And, for all the pessimists to the contrary, the human instinct is to laugh. . . . I saw a canvas sign over a small store, on a cross-street impassable at the moment with snowdrifts. It bore the ancient quip, *"Whether the weather be cold or hot, we've got to have weather, whether or not. Buy your Arctic overshoes here."*

New York City, that February 10th, thought it was all a good joke. . . .

FREDDIE and I had a compartment on the Congressional. We anticipated it would be nearly midnight by the time we got to Washington; Freddie flung himself moodily on the lounge as though he were prepared to sleep all the way, except when we might perhaps order in dinner.

Freddie at this time was twenty-seven. I had always liked him, though physically and temperamentally we were quite opposite types. I am typically Dutch, short and wide, heavy-set and stocky. But not fat. Built, as Freddie once told me, along the general lines of a young cart horse. And, as he has also remarked, I have the Dutch phlegmatic sparseness of speech, which in my case, he insists, often turns surly.

Freddie, not much taller than I, was slender almost to thinness. But wiry; I have wrestled with him, and he twists like an eel, with surprising strength. A sandy-haired, pale-blue-eyed, freckle-faced fellow, usually grinning, and with a swift, ready flow of speech.

His mind not only was alert, but keen. Scientifically inclined; and an extremely good mathematician. He had made good at astronomical work from the start. As a clocker of delicate star-transits, in father's opinion he had no equal; and he could sit all day over tedious routine mathematics and never tire.

I eyed him now as he lay on the lounge in our train compartment. It was wholly abnormal for Freddie to be so morose.

"Whatever it is father's got to tell me," I commented, "it sits like lead on you, doesn't it?"

"Yes," he said abruptly. And he added, "He ordered me to say nothing, so I'm doing it."

I found father equally solemn. It was eleven o'clock when, after crossing the snow-filled Washington streets, we reached my home. Father greeted us at the door with what was a very sick attempt at a smile.

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"Come in, boys. You're lucky to get here at all. Hello, Frederick. Brought your model? That's good—we'll look at it presently. . . . Hello, son—I understand you've been pampering a murderess."

In the study, when we had discarded our overclothes, his manner abruptly changed. We sat down, and he stood facing us, and then began restlessly pacing the little circular room, as though undecided how to begin telling me.

"Peter," he said at last, "you'll think it's queer that I've said nothing to you —my son—of this—this thing that is upon us now—this catastrophe to the world—"

My heart leaped. Yet it was hardly a surprise. Knowledge of it all had been coming to me little by little for weeks; fragments here and there, like the meaningless parts of a puzzle which now his words, adding nothing new, pieced together to make my premonitions a complete realization. He spoke swiftly, fronting me with his squared, heavy shoulders; his dark eyes holding me with his somber gaze.

"No use to worry you, son, or to frighten Hulda—you could be of no help—and we're all in it together—the whole world. . . . They've lifted the censorship. The time has come when it is best for everyone to know it—this inevitable thing. Peter, you can give it to your organization to-night, and to the world. The widest publicity—this statement from me and my organization—"

He stopped abruptly, seeming to realize the incoherence of his words, striving to master his emotions and tell me calmly. He seized a chair and sat facing me, smiling at Freddie; and he lighted a cigar.

But his fingers trembled. He was a man of sixty at this time; a squarely solid, commanding figure; a smooth-shaved face, square-jawed, dark, restless eyes, with gray-black, bushy brows and a shock of iron-gray hair. A crisp, forceful speaker. But he had not been so to-night. I have never seen him look so old, almost haggard. And the usual clear-white of his eyes was shot with blood.

I understood it as he talked; past weeks of anxiety, nights of sleepless observation at the telescope, watching Xenephrene, the new world; watching it come in to join our little solar family; observing by night—and all day busy with unending calculations of Xenephrene's changing orbit as it rounded the sun and took its place among us.

Watching. At first with interest, surprise, awe; then with a dawning fear. Then, his hurried conferences with other scientists. He had been three times to London, I now learned—and once, a consultation of astronomers was held at the Chan observatory, in Tibet.

And then, conferences of the scientists with the world governments, at which time the censorship was ordered. And father went back to his post, to observe and calculate the daily abnormal changes in our sunrise and sunset. Until at last the truth could no longer be escaped. The future could be prognosticated, to a mathematical certainty; the censorship must be lifted and the world told.

Father's voice, with its old dominating ring now, boomed at me.

"The world must be told, Peter. We cannot, dare not, hide it any longer. This new planet Xenephrene—I'll give you all the technical details; I have them here." He waved a sheaf of typewritten papers at me. "Your office can prepare it in any form you like. The coming of Xenephrene—its new bulk so near us—has disturbed, is now disturbing, our earth. You know it—everybody knows it instinctively, though they do not realize it or understand it."

"The weather—" I began; and my pounding heart seemed nearly smothering me.

"Yes—the weather. And our queerly shortened winter days. All these abnormal conditions which have come upon us this winter. Xenephrene has affected us astronomically—in just one way. The inclination of the axis of our earth is altering! Do you know what that really means? Can you explain it to the public?"

"He can," Freddie burst out. "He will."

The axis of the earth! Our seasons—our winter and summer—our climate—our days and nights—changing, permanently changing? It seemed for an instant, nothing. And then it seemed a thought too amazing, too unnatural to encompass. The basic order of everything from time immemorial now to be changed? And as I listened to his swift, brusque words my head reeled with it.

THE axis of the earth was slowly swinging so that eventually our South Pole would point directly to the sun and there become stabilized. This would oc-

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cur on April 5 next. Our new seasons, our new astronomical year, would begin on that date.

"Can you realize what that will mean, Peter? When our South Pole points to the sun there will be a torrid zone in the southern hemisphere. The great Antarctic polar continent will blaze into a tropical glory. Patagonia, the Magellan Straits, Australia, the Federated Cape Provinces, far southern Chile and the Argentine—all in the blazing tropics. Six months of that, with days months long in

A thing of beauty, she floated in a sailing arc against the star-studded heavens, directly over the heads of the astonished couple

which the sun never sets! Then swinging back to winter.

"The new temperate zone will be at our equator. Not very temperate. Snow and ice alternating with months of blazing heat. And all our northern hemisphere—it will have six months, beginning next April, of total darkness and frightful cold."

His voice rose to a grim power. "Ah, you're just beginning to realize what it will mean to us! New seasons, and new periods of day and night! Blazing noon at the South Pole! Dark, silent, congealed midnight in the north. Darkness like a cold black shroud over most of our northern hemisphere. Our greatest cities are here, Peter. London, New York, Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, Peking—from forty to fifty North Latitude. All will be buried for months in the darkness of arctic night!"

He laughed just a little wildly. "They think it is a joke now, this strange new winter which has descended upon us. They're beginning, in New York, to treat it like a Canadian winter carnival. Fun while it lasts, and then spring and summer will come soon again—because they always have before. But this time, Peter,

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spring and summer won't come soon again.

"The winter will grow colder. They have only seen its carnival aspect so far. But the cold of the north has fangs. It's a monster—a hideous monster whose congealing breath is death. It's lurking up there, ready to creep upon us. It's in Canada now—in north Asia, in northern Europe. You don't know that because our government has been so carefully suppressing the news.

"They're laughing in New York because it gets dark so early in the afternoon. It's fun to tumble in the snow in the early afternoon twilight. But they won't laugh in another week or two. The blessed sunlight for New York is almost gone. Shorter days—still shorter—until soon there will be no day at all!

"Our huge cities here in the north, all buried in the snow and ice and darkness of a polar winter! The greatest catastrophe in the history of the world—we're facing it now! No power on earth can help us to escape it, for it's inevitable!"

CHAPTER II

THE WHITE GIRL IN THE MOONLIGHT

THE plantations of the Cains in Porto Rico lay back from the north coast, some thirty kilometers from San Juan. Bisected by the railroad and by the main auto road, they spread green and fragrant in the vivid sunlight. Rows of orange and grapefruit trees, stretching over the undulating sand, with pineapples between the rows of trees.

Here and there, thickets of banana trees, encouraged to grow and break the force of the trade wind from the sea; a tall spreading mango—a sapling perhaps back in the almost forgotten days when Spain ruled this island; clumps, occasionally, of giant coconuts rising on the low hillsides; trees with smooth brown trunks and feather-duster tops, the trunks all bent backward from the coast by the wind.

The main auto road, lined with its majestic royal palms, was oily black and sometimes very noisy; the railroad with its metal ties was a dark streak like a double pencil line amid the green of the trees. But the plantation crossroads were white ribbons of sand in the sunlight, and whiter still at night, under the white glory of the moon.

It was then—at night—that the magic romance of the tropics was to me always most poignant. At sundown the brisk trades were stilled. A quiet, brooding somnolence fell upon everything. The native shacks, palm-thatched, burned brown by the sun, turned darkly mysterious. Off beyond the distant coast, as it showed from the commanding height of the Cains' veranda, the sea at night was dimly purple under a gem-studded purple sky; and sometimes the moonbeams shimmered off there in the silent magic darkness. The scent of the orange blossoms hung heavy in the still air, exotic, stirring the fancy to a million half formed dreams that one may tell but never express.

Upon the highest knoll—an eminence of perhaps a hundred feet—stood the Cains' plantation house. A white road led up the slope to it. A broad, spreading frame bungalow, with a peaked tin roof, and a wide flat veranda around three of its sides, with coconut posts set at intervals. A bunch of bananas always hung there, ripening; a box, lying against the house wall, was filled with oranges at intervals by a native boy.

Beyond the house, at the edge of the knoll-top, a corral with open sides and a heavy-thatched roof housed the saddle and workhorses. The Cains' one concession to modernity—the garage, and a small hangar for Dan's sport plane—stood well beyond the foot of the knoll. In the evening, lolling in the wicker chairs of the veranda, one could not see the garage, and if the traffic on the main road chanced to be dull, one might go back in fancy half a century, to when this magic land must have been at its best. It was still very beautiful. Sunlight and color and warmth.

But the blight, here as everywhere else in the northern hemisphere, was already at hand.

"To-morrow," said Dan, "we'll ride over to Arecibo. Want to, Hulda?"

"On horseback?"

"Yes," he said. "Of course. You don't think, knowing you as I do, I'd insult you with a car or a plane?"

Hulda can drive a car or handle a plane as well as any one. But for all our Dutch stolidity, there is a strain of romance in us. Hulda's greatest pleasure was riding astride the little Porto Rican horses; and though there seems nothing hotter on earth than a white sand road

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at noon in the cane fields, Hulda would always ride through them with delight.

"Good," she said, and laughed. "Señor Dan, that will please me much."

But her mocking laugh was forced, for this was February 10th of that fateful winter. An unknown fear lay upon Hulda, as on us all; and the cane fields on the way to Arecibo might have been hot other years, but they certainly were not hot now.

This evening, for instance, as Mr. and Mrs. Cain and their son Dan, and Hulda, sat in the living room of the bungalow, the shutters were all closed and a huge brazier of charcoal burned beside them for warmth. Already it had smoked up the ceiling; and Mr. Cain, despairing that the cool spell would soon moderate, promised his wife for the tenth time that he would get a stove from San Juan and rig it up all shipshape with a pipe—"Like in Vermont, eh, Ellen? Hulda, I'm going to radio your father to-morrow. This local weather bureau's too dumb to tell me anything. Your father ought to know—he's a scientist; they're supposed to know everything."

The Cains were what, a decade or so ago, were called plain folks. New Englanders, Cain had made his money on a Vermont farm. Their only son Dan had grown to manhood; graduated from college with one of the new agricultural degrees; and partly because of Mrs. Cain's frail health they had taken Dan and established themselves in Porto Rico.

Dan now was the brains and the energy of the business. I had gone to school with Dan Cain. A big, rangy, husky six-footer; with crisp, curly brown hair, blue eyes and a laughing boyish sun-tanned face.

A handsome young giant, I should imagine any girl would love him at sight. Demure little Hulda—a brown sparrow of a girl—loved him, I felt certain, though nothing as yet had been said of any engagement between them. I rather hoped it would come to pass; and I think Dan's parents did also, for Hulda was very lovable.

LIFE often holds odd coincidences. At eleven o'clock, this night of February 10, I was in Washington with father and Freddie. What father was telling me I thought then the most important event of the world's welfare.

But at almost the same time, Hulda, in Porto Rico, was sitting in the living room with Dan Cain. And another event, wholly different in significance yet of equal importance to the world, was impending. The elder Cains had retired. Dan and Hulda, characteristic of them of late when alone, had fallen into sober discussion.

Dan was really perturbed over the weather. The temperature had gone far into the forties the night before. Florida citrus trees might stand that for a limited period, but it certainly was not good for Porto Rican trees. And the Florida citrus industry was wiped out this winter. It had snowed last week all over the peninsula; a fall of snow with a following freeze that had killed everything which the December freeze had spared. And now—into the forties in Porto Rico! Ten degrees lower would be freezing. If this kept on—

The sound of a pony thudding up the knoll at a gallop broke in upon Hulda's and Dan's gloomy reflections. They stared at each other.

"What could that be?" Dan was on his feet.

The pony came up to the front porch entrance, stopped, and on the wooden steps bare feet sounded. Dan flung open the door. The pale-blue vacuum light newly established in the Porto Rican rural districts was behind him; the doorway was a dark rectangle of brilliant stars and cold moonlight, and a rush of chill air swept in.

A peon was on the porch, dirty white trousers and white shirt, ghostly in the moonlight. He was barefooted and bareheaded. His little white pony stood at the foot of the steps in a lather of sweat, drooping and panting.

"Ramon!" Dan exclaimed. "What the devil! Come in here!"

It was one of the Cain's house boys. He came in, chattering, but not from cold. His coffee-colored face had a green cast with its pallor. He was frightened almost beyond speech.

"What the devil!"

Dan shook the boy with annoyance. Hulda stood apart, staring, and a nameless fear was on her; an unreasonable shudder as though this thing—in its outward aspect the mere fright of a native boy, which probably meant nothing important—were something gruesome, horrible, unutterably frightening.

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"Ramon—" Dan shook him again, and the boy suddenly poured out a flood of Spanish; broken, incoherent — Hulda could not understand it. She saw Dan's face grow grave, and then he laughed. But it struck Hulda then that the incredulous laugh had a note of fear in it.

"Ramon, *que dice?*" The boy understood English. Dan added, "Don't be a fool, Ramon! Tell me—"

Hulda gasped, "What—what is it, Dan?"

He swung on her, and as he saw her face, the solemn fear in her dark eyes, his laugh faded.

"Hulda, he says he was riding home from a fiesta over at the Rolf plantation in Factor. Coming back—you know the hills back there where the bat caves are—what we call our Eden tract? He saw something—a woman like a ghost, he says—a woman's figure that jumped—it's out there now!"

Ramon had shrunk against the wall, shuddering; the whites of his black eyes glistened in the blue glare of the vacuum tube.

"Ramon, you been drinking?"

"No! Oh, no—no, señor!"

"What—else, Dan?"

Hulda wanted to laugh. It was funny, taking seriously, paying attention to a native's devil story. Other years, an Americano señor would laugh derisively at any peon who talked of a ghost he had seen in the moonlight. But not now; there was an uncanniness in the very air everywhere in the world this winter.

The boy was quieter. He told Dan more and Dan soberly translated it. A thing like a great round silver ball—big as a native shack—glistening with the moonlight on it as it lay in a coconut grove, a mile from the Cains' plantation house, near the hills where the bat caves are.

Ramon's pony had suddenly shied, and then Ramon had seen the gleaming white thing lying there. And then he had seen a figure—like the white figure of a woman or a girl—a white girl, with flowing white hair.

It was quite near him. Standing beside the sloping trunk of a big palm tree that grew on the hillside. Twenty feet away, perhaps, and ten feet higher than the trail along which he was riding.

Ramon was stiff with fear. His pony had halted; it stood with upraised head and pointing ears. It saw the white woman's motionless figure and suddenly raised its head with a long shuddering neigh of fear. The sound must have startled the white woman up there. Ramon saw her crouch; then she leaped from the hillside.

His pony bolted. And then he lashed it for home, fearing the thing was chasing him.

Dan was very solemn. "That doesn't sound like a ghost tale, Hulda. Ramon, saddle our ponies. Mine—*Parti-blanco*—and the señorita's. Not with the *aparejo*—with the man's saddle."

He glanced at Hulda, her trim figure in leather puttees and brown riding trousers; and her face was now almost as white as her white blouse.

She stammered. "You want to go out there—go and see—"

Ramon whimpered, "Señor, I'm afraid, here at the corral—if it followed after me."

DAN strode to the porch. The broad spread of the plantations lay solemn and still under the cold white moon. The thatched roof of the corral was dark, with inky black shadows beside the building. The banana trees arching up over the house waved gently in the night breeze. Everything was sharply white and black. But there was no sign of any intruder, human or otherwise.

"I'll go with you to saddle the ponies, Ramon. We'll go—you want to go, Hulda?"

"Yes," she said. She felt at that moment too frightened to stay in the house without Dan, and thought of the elder Cains asleep in the adjoining room never occurred to either of them.

With sweaters donned against the midnight cold, they saddled the ponies and started.

Dan rode ahead, with Hulda almost beside him, and Ramon, his pony reluctant as himself, following after them. It was a brief ride, during which they hardly spoke. Down the knoll, past the silent garage; past the somnolent group of shacks of the plantation workers.

The road was narrow—white sand like a trail; coconut trees arched it in places, and beside it spread the tracts of fruit trees. It wound back toward a low-lying range of hills and up a steep declivity, where it turned stony from the rain water which daily washed down it.

Dan was flinging watchful glances around them. "Don't see anything yet,

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Hulda. Do you?" His voice was a cautious half whisper.

The sure-footed ponies picked their way carefully up the stony trail. They went through a little ravine and emerged into a small valley, a plateau almost flat on this higher land. Hills a hundred feet high fenced it in; its table-like surface of white sand was ruled off with the dark green lines of fruit trees. It was the Cains' two-hundred acre "Eden tract." It lay brooding and drowsy under the moon, without a sign of human movement.

Dan halted; Ramon's pony came beside him.

"Where were you when you saw it, Ramon?"

The boy gestured. He was trembling again. He held his pony forcibly from wheeling to run back. The other ponies seemed to sense the terror; they raised their heads; one whimpered; and they were all quivering. But Dan forced them slowly forward.

The trail skirted the hills to the left. Above it, halfway up a steep ascent, three black yawning mouths of the bat-caves showed. Hulda had often been in them with Dan; a guano deposit in them was used as fertilizer for the trees. Hulda saw them now, round and black, with the moonlight on the rocks beside them, fifty feet above the valley.

Ramon suddenly chattered: "There! You see it? *Ave Maria—*"

Off at the edge of the fruit trees, in the shadows of a clump of coconut palms, a great round thing gleamed. A silver sphere, like a white ball some twenty feet high, lying there. A broken ball! It was several hundred feet away, but Hulda could see a black rift in it. A crack? A doorway!

She knew it then. Not with conscious reasoning, but she knew then what all this was to mean. A silver sphere lying there, with a black rift in it like a doorway. And a small black patch on its side —like a window!

"Hulda! Look!" Dan's hand went to her arm with a grip that both hurt and steadied her. The three ponies were standing with braced feet in the sand. Dan's flung up its head to neigh; but his fist thumped its head and stilled it.

And then Hulda saw the figure, as the native boy had seen it half an hour before. It was standing now near the trail, ahead of them; standing there between two orange trees; and just as Hulda saw it, the thing moved over, and stopped in the moonlight on the white trail, as though to bar their passage. It was not far ahead of them. Hulda could see it plainly. A white figure. But it did not shimmer; not ghostly—white only because of the moonlight on it. Uncanny, weird, yet not gruesome.

It was the figure of a girl; small, as small as Hulda. A slim, pink-white girl's body, with flowing draperies which in daylight might have been sky-blue. Long white hair flowing over pink shoulders.

Dan's grip on Hulda tightened; then he cast her off and his hand caught her bridle reins and held her pony firmly. Behind them Ramon and his pony were thudding away in a panic.

Dan breathed: "It—she sees us!"

The girl's arms went slowly up as though with a gesture. It seemed a gesture not menacing; a gesture of fear perhaps. Pale-white arms, of delicate human shape. They were bare, but as they slowly raised, the folds of the drapery clung to them.

Abruptly Dan called: "Hello, there—"

The figure did not move further. But the ponies were becoming unmanageable, Dan exclaimed hastily: "Dismount, Hulda! You'll be thrown off—I can hold them."

Hulda and Dan dismounted. But Dan could not hold the ponies. They jerked away from him. He and Hulda were left standing in the sand of the trail, gazing after the two terror-stricken little animals as they galloped away toward home.

DAN remembered later that there came to him then a fleeting wonderment. Why were these ponies so afraid of this white figure of a girl in the moonlight? From this distance there seemed nothing about the figure unduly to frighten an animal. The question was not answered until long afterward. But there were indeed things about this white shape which the ponies evidently saw and felt—things which were denied to Hulda's and Dan's human senses.

Hulda gasped: "Oh, they've gone!" She stood by Dan, clinging to him. The white figure in the road was gone also. But in a moment more they saw it again. Near to them now—not more than thirty feet away. It was standing off the trail among the fruit trees.

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Dan murmured: "It's human, Hulda. Nothing to be afraid of—see, it's only a girl. You call to her."

Hulda's quavering voice floated out: "We see you. Who are you? We're friends."

The figure moved again; backward, floating or walking soundlessly but swiftly, as though with sudden fear.

"Come on," said Dan. He started briskly forward along the trail, with Hulda close after him. But within a dozen steps, he stopped. And then, to both Dan and Hulda came amazement, and the thrill of real fear.

The figure had been retreating. But the hill was close behind it. Suddenly it stopped; seemed to gather itself; to crouch; to spring. It left the ground, and came sailing up into the unobstructed moonlight above the orange trees. Sailing up in an arc it passed almost directly over their heads and landed soundlessly in the road behind them!

As it passed overhead, outlined against the stars, they saw it more plainly. It seemed a girl of human form, cast in a fashion which might well have been called beautiful. She poised, not as though flying, but sailing. Face toward the ground, white hair waving behind her, arms outstretched, with the folds of her drapery robe opened fan-shape, fluttering like wings. There was a brief glimpse of her lower limbs, human of mold with the robe wound by the wind close around them.

A thing of beauty, had it not been so uncanny. She floated in a sailing arc as though almost weightless; and with a flip, dropped to the ground upright upon her feet. A fairy's leap! Soundless, graceful! Romantic, yet uncanny. A figure of enchantment from the dream of a child.

Dan tried to laugh. Fear seemed incongruous. As he and Hulda turned, the figure stood again in the trail facing them. And they could see it was a slim young girl, strangely beautiful, fearful as a fawn at their approach; yet she lingered, seeming—Dan wondered if his fancy were playing him tricks—desirous of conquering her fear and encountering them.

"Hulda—nothing to be afraid of. Don't move—you'll frighten her!"

They stood motionless. The white girl in the moonlight down the road took a step forward. They did not move. She came a little further. Paused. Then another step. Not floating. Walking—they could see the outlines of her limbs moving beneath the drapery.

And now they could see her face. Queer, strange of feature, yet in what way they could not have said. And certainly beautiful; gentle; anxious, and afraid. Youthful, a mere girl; and with those flowing waves of snow-white hair framing her face and falling thick over her pink-white shoulders.

She stood, twenty feet away. Dan and Hulda were almost holding their breaths. Dan murmured: "Speak to her again. Softly—don't frighten her!"

Hulda said gently: "Can you understand me? We're friends."

The strange girl stood birdlike, trembling. Hulda repeated: "We're friends—won't hurt you. Shall we come nearer? Who are you?"

There was a moment of silence. And then the girl spoke. A soft whisper of a voice, ethereal as the fairy voice of a child's enchanted fancy; a wraith of sound, but it carried, and Hulda and Dan heard it plainly.

"Zetta! Zetta! Zetta!"

CHAPTER III

THE CROWNING TERROR

THERE was so much happening everywhere in the world during those fateful weeks that followed February 10, 1953—events so startling, amazing, so stupendous of import, and of such diversity that I scarce know how to recount them. Of necessity my mention of many must be brief; and my picture of the whole, I fear, will be at best incoherent.

Yet in that quality, at least, it will be a true picture; the world was incoherent, chaotic—everywhere a chaos of events unprecedented, uncontrollable. And in the chaos which swept Freddie and me away, the news from Dan Cain in Porto Rico, important though it was, at the time concerned us little.

Father was in constant communication with the Cains; and later, after father had gone to Miami when the Federal capital was moved there in flight from Washington, he went to Porto Rico.

The announcement that our world was to have such different days and nights, and a climate so utterly changed, struck the public with horror.

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"I held a piece of paper in the beam. It shriveled immediately, blackened and burst into flame"

It is not my purpose to try to detail or to picture it. The chaos everywhere; the paralyzation of industry throughout the northern hemisphere which so far had been proceeding by man's will against all the invading efforts of nature to wreck it; the panics that took place in all the northern cities—crowds of refugees struggling to get south; inadequate transportation; accidents; and a horrible crime-wave that swept unchecked over every one of the large population centers.

Human activities in our modern world are very widely diversified; more widely varied—and yet more intermingled, more interdependent—than any one realizes until there comes an upset from the normal.

There is, in these modern times, nothing that anyone does which does not almost immediately affect what some one else is doing. Had the change come slowly, spread over a hundred, or a thousand or a hundred thousand years as other great world changes have come and passed, conditions would have adjusted themselves. No one would even have noticed the change.

But this was happening in minutes where others had taken centuries. New York, London, Paris and all the cities of the north were doomed to six months of twilight and night and blighting cold. Snow now was upon land, millions of acres of land, where crops soon would have been growing if millions of people were to have food. Yet now we know those millions of acres would be for months snow-buried.

Millions of homes soon would be without adequate heat or light; and the people without adequate clothing. Rivers upon which the great power plants depended were congealing into ice.

This for the north, with business, industry and nearly every human activity

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paralyzed by the sudden public horror. But in the south, from the Equator to the South Pole, lay the land of promise. Or at least the public thought so.

Life lay there; life and the promise of food and warmth and the blessed sunlight. For in the far Antarctic south, with the new light and heat coming, millions upon millions of acres of land would be springing into a new fertility to replace what the north had lost. But this, too, was a fallacy; for after a few months, the pendulum would swing back; the far south would go into night and cold.

Many hundred million people, suddenly giving up all their accustomed work in the world's activities and trying to move to another region! A migration greater than the sum total of all others in the world's history. In a hundred years of systematic, careful planning and execution it might have been accomplished without disaster. But now it was a panic, a chaos, a flight, with distracted governments trying to cope with it, impotent to bring even a semblance of order.

Our office of the Amalgamated Broadcasters was maintained in New York City until well along in February. With government affiliation, we broadcasted only what might be of help to the public; news of conditions, generally censored to allay too great a fear; advice as to what to do; information concerning transportation, and news from the south. In this work, Freddie now joined me. There were days—almost dark now except for a brief time before and after midday—when he and I were in our cold office, one or the other of us at the microphone throughout the twenty-four hours.

It was an office of incoherent men and disorganized service; without light, some of the time; with frozen and burst heating pipes and no one to repair them. We sat bundled in our overcoats, with snow piling against the windows.

News came of crowds surging in the dark, snow-piled streets; food giving out, with paralyzed transportation; news of raids by the public upon all the markets; news of people trampled to death hourly at every steamship dock, every bridge leading out of the city; uncontrollable crowds at the tunnels, the railroad and plane terminals.

State troopers vainly patrolled streets made almost impassable by snow which now could not be cleared away; people froze in the cold with which they were not equipped to cope; crime was everywhere, with criminals, like ghouls, battening on the tragedy.

IN THOSE terrible days there were few concerned with astronomy. Yet I recall that one of my orders was to detail—for such as might still be listening—a simple version of how, astronomically, all this was coming to pass.

"Perhaps," I broadcasted, "when we know the fundamentals of this change—the scientific reasons for it—the thing may hold less terror for us."

Useless words! Nothing could mitigate the terror!

"You all know in a general way," I went on, "the astronomical reasons for our alternating day and night—our succession of seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter. Yet if you follow me closely now, and picture what I tell you, the subject will be clearer to your mind, and you will understand the change which is now upon us. Some of you, our government has advised, should remain in the north and withstand the rigors of the new climate. New York City will not be abandoned! That is absurd! It is the sudden change, the upset to our normal routine, which has now caused suffering.

"When we are equipped for the new conditions, New York and other cities in its latitude will be perfectly habitable. We will have winter nights several months long, and an arctic cold. Then spring, and a summer with the sun giving us months of unending daylight. Those must be our productive months—we must grow food then, to supply the southern hemisphere, just as in the other months they must grow food down there.

"Do not be too hasty! We cannot all—every one on earth—rush at once to the Equator! Even there at times it will be too hot, and a twilight winter fairly cold. Cold enough, a month or two from now, to disorganize everything.

"It is your panic—your haste—which is our greatest danger. Be calm! Meet the conditions as they are. Help our government to maintain order, here in the north. The world's work must be done—the new conditions must be coped with sanely. We are not in desperate distress; only through panic can real disaster come!"

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THESE were our broadcasted words of government appeal. And then I went on: "There is no need for panic. We want you to understand the astronomical reasons for our new climate. I want you to imagine yourself standing before your round, empty dining room table. Conceive that the room is dark and that you have placed, almost in the center of the table, a circular vacuum globe of yellow light. That represents the sun.

"Take now an orange, and through its center put a lead pencil. The orange is the earth. By holding in your fingers the ends of the lead pencil, you can rotate the orange. The lead pencil then represents the axis of the earth.

"Can you picture yourself in your darkened room under these conditions? As you stand facing the round table with the light near its center, you hold the orange on its lead pencil to the right of you near the edge of the table. You hold the lead pencil vertical; its point, standing directly up to the ceiling would be then our North Pole; its eraser, pressed against the table edge, would be our South Pole.

"You will find now that the light from your 'sun' illuminates about half the orange—the half which faces toward the sun. The orange is lighted from the North Pole to the South Pole—on the sunward side. The other side is in shadow.

"Now, rotate the orange, holding the pencil exactly upright. You will see that the moving surface brings its shadowed side into the sunlight. This rotation gives us our alternating night and day.

"Still holding the pencil upright, begin now slowly carrying it with the orange around the edge of the table. You will realize, if you think for a moment, that, *with the pencil held exactly vertical,* it makes no difference whether the orange is on one side of the table or the other. The sunlight on its surface is exactly the same in every position around the table. Under this condition, therefore, we would have uniformly alternating days and nights of equal length; and *no change of season.* You can see the most intense light would always be at the equator, and the least intense, down to perpetual twilight, at the Poles. Thus it would always be midsummer at the equator, temperate to the north and south equally, and winter equally and always at both Poles.

"But this, of course, was not our condition. The axis of our earth was not vertically upright, as I have asked you first to picture it. Conceive now that you hold the orange and pencil again to your right at the table edge. Instead now of having the pencil point directly upward, slant it off *to the right—away from the sun*—toward the edge of your ceiling where it joins the wall, for instance. To be more exact, you are to tilt it over until it is about one-quarter of the way to a horizontal position. Mathematically, this is twenty-three and a half degrees from the vertical.

"The top of the pencil—the North Pole—is now tilted away from the sun—the bottom is tilted toward the sun. You will realize now that the sunlit half of the orange is not from Pole to Pole. The light extends beyond and around the South Pole to the other side—and the light *does not reach the North Pole at all.*

"Rotate the orange with the pencil held at that tilted angle. There are points at and near the South Pole which do not leave the light; and points at and near the North Pole are always dark. That is our *normal* condition in December. In the northern hemisphere we call it winter; in the southern hemisphere they call it summer.

"Now move your orange around the edge of the table, halfway around until you are on the other side. If you have kept the pencil tilted at that same angle toward your ceiling corner, you will find now that its top is pointing *toward the sun.* All the conditions on the orange's surface are reversed. That is June; summer in the North, winter in the South.

"Those days are gone. We are now faced with an axis change—disastrous only because it is changing so quickly. And I want you to know just exactly what the change is. Conceive again your orange at the right hand of the table, with the pencil point tilted away from the sun at that twenty-three and one-half degree angle. We were like that last December. But since then a new world has come into the solar system. Its coming has disturbed the old order of things with us. The eraser of that lead pencil—our South Pole—is moving up further toward the sun!

"Take the orange a short distance along the table edge, and tilt the pencil still further. That is where we are now, in February! Don't you realize that more

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of our southern hemisphere is now in the constant light, and more of the northern in the constant darkness? And now, tilt the lead pencil further until it is horizontal to the table.

"The eraser—the South Pole—points directly to the sun! That is the position we will reach next April. Rotate the orange, holding the pencil level. You will see that the light remains on the southern half of the orange, and the northern half remains dark! On April 5, we will have no day and night!

"Six months later the earth will be halfway around its orbit. The axis will remain in that new fixed position. The reverse condition then will exist. Our North Pole will point to the sun! Light and heat in the North! Darkness and cold in the South! So do not be too hasty in trying to get away! These next few months will be bad, but after that we will learn how to weather them. We cannot all live on the equator! Stay where you are and help us fight it through!"

FUTILE words! But it was the panic of flight—the attempted rush of so many millions of people—the disorganization of all those myriad activities upon which life depends—which was our greatest danger.

Futile words! Impotent governments, themselves disingenuous, for they were all preparing for hasty flight to warmer, more equable regions! On February 22 the National Capital of the United States was moved from Washington, District of Columbia, to temporary housing in Miami, Florida. And even there, the great Florida city was disorganized, snow-covered, with very nearly zero temperature.

The deaths throughout the northern hemisphere that February of 1953 will never be counted. A million? Many millions—I would hesitate to guess.

There were some nine million people within the limits of Greater New York on Christmas. By mid-February I suppose there were no more than a scant fifty thousand left—and these, most of them, were trying to get away. A dark, almost deserted, buried city—buried in a white shroud which mercifully hid its tragedy.

I caught one last glimpse of the sun—the one clear day; the sun at noon just creeping above the southern horizon and then plunging back. The Arctic night was on us.

I saw the roads between New York and Washington—the great highways for the through auto traffic. Refugees were trudging along them on foot, carrying lights in the darkness. Plunging through the snow; walking blindly southward when they could go no other way. Falling by the roadside; all the traffic lines were littered with frozen bodies, soon hidden by the snow.

We were not in Washington long; soon we were ordered to Miami. There was a gray twilight there, which, with the buildings arranged for temporary heating, were at least tolerable. And here we set up our headquarters. The first of March came. Father was in Porto Rico. I knew, by then, what strange things were transpiring there in the Cains' plantation house.

I knew, too, what the astronomers—gathered now at Quito, Ecuador, as the best place in the Western World for twilight observation—had discovered.

Xenephrene was inhabited!

Father was convinced of it the day after that momentous February 10. But the news—and the news from the secluded little plantation house of the Cains—was withheld from the public. But on March 2, everything was disclosed. For our distracted world one culminating blow remained. As though all that had gone before were not enough, fate held one crowning terror.

On March 2 it was broadcast that a hostile race of people in human form had come from Xenephrene and landed on the earth! Invaders from this brand new world! Landed two days before, north of New York; and now were moving south upon the city!

CHAPTER IV

ZETTA

THAT midnight of February 10th, Hulda and Dan stood on the small Porto Rican trail, facing at a brief distance the white girl in the moonlight. She answered Hulda's call; in a queerly small voice her words came to them:

"Zetta! Zetta! Zetta!"

There was a brief silence. Dan murmured, "Let's go nearer."

Slowly, carefully, they advanced; fearful of again frightening her. But this time she did not move. She stood watchful, trembling slightly, but held her

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ground. And presently they were confronting her. She was shorter even than Hulda; very slim and frail. A young girl just reaching maturity. A rose, not yet full-blown. The thought occurred to Dan. But the comparison was wrong. Not a rose, for this was a flower of young womanhood of a species no one of earth could name.

She seemed, aside from her snow-white hair, no more than a strangely beautiful girl of earth. But to both Dan and Hulda came again, more strongly than before, the feeling of her strangeness. There was something singularly unusual in her aspect. And this they both recall clearly; as they stood there for a silent instant confronting her, both were conscious of sensations indescribable, as though they were feeling something within themselves—something vague, elusive—something no mortal of earth had ever felt before. And, perhaps, hearing something—so faint, so ethereal they could not define it—faint as though it were sound heard not by their ears, but by their minds.

And they saw something, too, which perhaps no mortal eyes had ever seen before. An aura, a dim, very faint red radiance shone around the three of them as they stood there together in the moonlight. Hulda and Dan remembered it was something like that.

They stood for a moment, stricken with wonder at their sensations; and perhaps the strange girl was less timorous as she saw their attitude of awe. She stared up into Dan's face, and smiled. Queerly wistful; trusting. A gentle little creature! And he stared down into her dark eyes and found them shimmering pools of iridescence. Then again she spoke, other words in a strange, liquid tongue, soft, with curiously clipped, intoned syllables.

Dan shook his head. "We can't understand you. Can you understand us?" He smiled; and Hulda smiled.

"She's not afraid of us," said Dan. The girl was waving a hand with what they knew was a gesture of negation. She could not understand their language; and when Dan tried Spanish—realizing it was futile; and tried his imperfect French—her gesture continued.

He tried again. "Dan! Dan! Dan!" he said, and struck his chest. And Hulda indicated herself with "Hulda! Hulda!"

The girl's eager face brightened. They had established communication; the first communication between Xenephrene and our earth!

The girl cried, "Zetta, Zetta," and laid her hand on her breast.

It was the first communication between the worlds. What dire events, tragedies, amazing things to transpire before the last communication was over!

IT IS not my purpose, and again, I have no space in which to narrate all the details of these days. The girl was persuaded to follow Dan and Hulda, and through all that February she lived with the Cains in the plantation house, guarded and kept hidden, though the news of her presence could not be entirely concealed.

The silver ball in the coconut grove was a vehicle in which, by some method unknown to earth, this girl—this Zetta, as she called herself—had come from her world, to ours. And she had not come alone. A man had come with her—he seemed to be of middle age. He lay dead near the vehicle. Perhaps the victim of an accident; or perhaps the girl had killed him.

There was no one, as yet, to say. Zetta could not, apparently, understand any earth language; and her language sounded hopeless to fathom. She seemed intelligent, docile, willing and anxious to be kept with the Cains; eager, it seemed at first, to be in the room with them—to hear them talk. But after that first night, she did not speak again; and they thought she had fallen into a sullen silence.

There is so much I have to tell! Astronomers at Quito had seen this silver vehicle enter the earth's atmosphere that night of February 10th; and had seen another, infinitely larger, which they believed had started from the surface of Xenephrene.

Dan notified father of his strange visitor, of course. Father sent instructions. The authorities of Porto Rico buried the man's body, and set a guard to watch constantly over the vehicle as it lay in the grove. Scientists came to inspect it, and could understand but vaguely its mechanism.

Two weeks passed. Father was in Miami then; and near the end of February he started by government plane for Porto Rico.

Conditions all over the world were far

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worse now. We only had a vague picture; the radio and television were operating intermittently—but all the regular channels for the dissemination of news were paralyzed. And, too, the governments withheld, or distorted to a less terrible aspect such reports as were available.

Europe was enveloped in snow to the Mediterranean; the Barbary coast was jammed with refugees. London and Paris, like New York, were threatened with complete abandonment.

In Canada, they said—like Scandinavia, north Interior Europe and Asia of the far north—there was less panic, less disaster. These people were accustomed to intense cold and equipped to withstand it.

In the Canadian rural district, the farmers shut themselves up with their winter fundamentals of food as had been their custom, and were said to be making out fairly well. But the big centers of population, dependent upon transportation and industry, were devastated. Greater Montreal was abandoned in February.

Transportation everywhere in the United States was kept partially open, but only by efforts born of the frantic desperation of necessity. The new Arctic airplanes, recently developed, were being hastily manufactured in quantity, in government plants established in Florida and Southern California, and were as hastily put into service to bear the people southward. The railroads of our northern States kept open for a while with snow plows loaned by the great Canadian trunk lines which had long since succumbed.

Steamship service along the Atlantic Coast ventured no farther north than Charleston, South Carolina. The North Atlantic was filled with ice floes driven south by the constant storms; the Polar ice field was reported now as extending nearly down to the former New York-Liverpool steamship lanes.

The St. Lawrence River was frozen solid, from Montreal past Quebec and down to its mouth, before Christmas. In January the middle Mississippi was solid with an ice bridge which one day broke and swept away three railroad bridges. The Hudson, from Troy to New York harbor, was solid by mid-February. Within a week after that even the Savannah River became impassable, and the port closed.

Yet, for all that, by whatever desperate expedient possible, the people were being transported south, and were cared for in their new locations, in the best fashion that could be managed.

WHAT formerly had been our tropic zone was thronged with new arrivals. Daily they poured in from the north. And from the far south, as well—in spite of government's pleadings and commands to the contrary; from Buenos Aires, Rio, Santiago, people were striving to get north, nearer the equator, fearful of this new heat and blazing daylight which was coming upon them.

Nor was it only a disturbance of the world's normal temperatures. With the abnormal climate came other inevitable disturbances. From widely divergent localities, devastating windstorms were reported. A typhoon, wholly out of season, swept the China Sea. A hurricane in Central America. From Peru and Chile they told of heavy rains flooding the arid coast. Rain fell at Biskra with torrential rainstorms sweeping up and across the Sahara.

I had been saying that father, near the end of February, went to Porto Rico. The two weeks previous to his arrival there were weeks of amazement growing daily into awe as Dan and Hulda were brought into closer contact with their beautiful, unearthly visitor.

It came upon them gradually, the strangeness, weirdness of this girl so like themselves at first glance, yet obviously a being wholly different. They treated her as a visiting guest, though in reality she was a captive. Upon father's advice—for he guessed, at least partially, what the outcome was to be—the Cains were content to do nothing with Zetta save to have her live with them in seclusion; and to make her comfortable.

That she was extremely intelligent, Dan saw at once. She evidently realized that they were wholly friendly. Whatever her purpose, living there with them seemed all she desired.

She had her own room, next to Hulda's. She seemed to appreciate Hulda's efforts for her comfort. She ate with the family, making whimsical faces at the food which she obviously disliked at first. For the rest, she seemed content to sit in the living room, watching them, listening to them talk.

To Dan, her constant presence was at

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once fascinating and disturbing. Fascinating, for Zetta's beauty was queerly magnetic, but disturbing, too, for there was about this girl always that uncanniness indefinable. For hours she would sit in the living room, apart from the family group. She did not like the chairs, preferring to sit crosslegged on the floor, on a cushion. She was very silent, although she would answer when spoken to, with a smile or a strange, friendly gesture, and with her eyes following each person who spoke.

Her complexion was the creamy, pink white which we of earth call beauty. She blushed, or flushed, readily. For no apparent reason a wave of rose color would suffuse her face, throat and neck. It even extended sometimes to her arms, and to her legs as they showed amid her half-revealing drapery—the smooth white of her skin flushing with deep rose color. For no reason; and then Dan noticed that it generally happened when the outer door was opened and a rush of cold air swept in. Nature automatically protecting against the cold!

Dan often would furtively watch her.

Gaunt, ghostly in the moonlight, lay the frost-congealed city of New York. Like frozen headstones the great buildings stood, coated with glistening ice. Nowhere, on land or water, was there any sign of life or motion

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He was sitting in a far corner of the room one evening; the elder Cains and Hulda were gathered about the radio.

The small, clear voice of the announcer was giving a summary of the world's tragic news, this middle of February; on the small television screen which the Miami Central Office was connecting with various localities to illustrate his words, vague, fleeting pictures were mirrored.

Zetta was seated on the floor, in an opposite corner from Dan. He saw that she was not listening to the radio. But she was listening to *something*! Her head was tilted alert; across her face a succession of her emotions was mirrored—a frown; whimsical pleasure; a smile.

She was listening; and Dan realized suddenly that she was hearing things he could not hear! A world of things, perhaps; something displeased her, she gestured disapprovingly; and then smiled again.

Uncanny! She was wholly absorbed, unaware that Dan was watching. Hearing things no mortal of earth could hear! Like a dog, Dan thought, which hears faint sounds denied its master. But Dan knew it was more than that.

And then his heart leaped. Zetta was seeing *something* he could not see! Something in the room. Her eyes followed it, as evidently it moved. She turned her head to gaze after it; she smiled, with breathless parted lips, then laughed.

Was she, perhaps, irrational? Conjuring visions in an unbalanced mind? The explanation occurred to Dan, but he did not believe it was so. Rather, it seemed to him, this girl's perceptions were more acute than ours.

She saw and heard things beyond the range of our human senses. Here on earth they were things strange to her. She was listening and watching them; surprised, often pleased, as one with normal senses gazes upon new sights and finds them interesting.

Dan found opportunity to regard the girl more closely. Her eyes, when she looked at him, seemed normal. But at other times he saw that her pupils became suddenly abnormally large; or again, contracted to pin points, even in the dimness of indoors. At once, a dark veil—a film—seemed to creep over the eyeball; but she became aware of the scrutiny, and it was gone before Dan could make sure.

Her ears, in outward shape a trifle rounder than ours, were generally hidden—pink shells in the waving mass of her white hair. Dan fancied that they moved at her will—that sometimes they expanded.

Her fingers, and her toes, were long, slim and tapering, with pink-white, pointed nails. The joints were more numerous than with us; it gave them a prehensile aspect; and Dan fancied, too, that the arch of the bottom of her foot was cup-shaped as though it might serve as a vacuum for walking upon inclined surfaces.

Father had told Dan that Zetta probably was from Xenephrene. But no one could be sure. An idea occurred to Dan, and a few days later, just before dawn, he and Hulda tried it. Xenephrene, on clear days, was visible just before sunrise. The weather, here in Porto Rico now, was generally below freezing. Once it had snowed. The Cains' fruit groves were killed; but with all the world's catastrophe for comparison, Dan and his father thought little of it. The Porto Rican day now was but two hours long. The sun made a low arc in the south, descending within two hours, not very much to the west of where it had risen.

IT WAS mid morning when in the darkness before dawn, Hulda and Dan with Zetta stood outside the plantation house. To the south Xenephrene would soon rise.

"Do you think she'll recognize it?" Hulda asked.

Dan smiled; how could one guess? Zetta stood between them, puzzled, looking first at one, then the other. She had walked out with them quietly. She always walked quietly, carefully, as though trying to imitate their own slow steps. And though Dan, with gestures, had often tried to make her leap into the air, she never would.

It was cold, this mid morning before dawn; Dan and Hulda were dressed in heavy, northern garments. Zetta wore the filmy robe in which they had first seen her. She seemed to prefer her own garments, a number of which had been brought from the vehicle, and installed with her at the Cains'. To the cold she was utterly oblivious; the cold of outdoors, or the warmth inside—she seemed not aware of the difference.

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They stood on the knoll. The sky to the southward was brightening. The stars there moved in a low arc. Then Xenephrene came up. Blazing, purple-white star.

"Look!" said Dan. "Zetta, look! We call that Xenephrene. Can't you understand me? Do you recognize that star? Your world? Did you come from there?"

At sight of the great purple star, a queer emotion swept her face. Dan pleaded: "Zetta, haven't you learned anything of our language? We call that Xenephrene. Your world? You came from there? Speak, Zetta!"

She said slowly in English, with an accent quaint and indescribable: "Yes. My worl'—I came from there."

"BUT what's the matter with you, Hulda?"

"Nothing."

"But there is!"

"Not at all, Dan. Why do you say that?"

"But there is! You're angry, or hurt. At me? What have I done?"

"Nonsense. You haven't done—" She stopped; and he saw that her eyes were filled with sudden tears; she tried to protest, but the words would not come.

They were sitting alone late one evening in the Cains' living room. Dan had noticed that for some days Hulda was abnormally quiet, and she no longer treated him with her usual comradeship. A reserve had come to her. And now, when he asked her why, she burst into tears!

She sobbed openly; he tried to put his arm around her, but she pushed him away.

"Hulda!" A light broke on Dan. "It's Zetta—why, you silly little girl—"

"You were—were kissing her this morning!"

"I was *not!* Nonsense!"

"Well, I s-saw you, with her in your arms, l-lifting her up—"

"Yes. Lifting her up. But not kissing her. But I'm kissing *you!* Now—like that! And *that*—Hulda, darling—"

It is not my part to reconstruct the scene that followed between them, although both have described the wonder of it all to all of the family who would listen—wonder and awe at the voicing of love which all of us knew they had felt for a year or two. They were engaged when ten minutes later they thumped on the elder Cains' door to tell them the wonderful news.

Dan maintained that to Zetta he owed a great debt of gratitude; for without Hulda's jealousy of Zetta, Dan says he might have been too stupid ever to propose. The episode with Zetta was simple enough; Dan explained it readily to Hulda's entire satisfaction.

He had been alone with Zetta that morning, trying to make her talk more of our language, which now he knew that she was learning. With a mind wholly different from ours—this Dan now realized—she undoubtedly was learning with extraordinary rapidity. But, quite evidently, she had her own method. She would not speak again; but when he began naming objects in the room, trying to aid her by systematic teaching, she showed approval and listened attentively.

During the course of this lesson, Dan had touched her. He laid his hand on her arm. Curious sensation! He felt at once, not a lack of solidity, but a seeming lack of weight. She had risen to her feet as though startled by his touch. He stood, from his much greater height looking down at her. Still holding her arm.

And this Dan confessed to me, but most assuredly he did not confess it to Hulda. As he stood here, staring into the glowing dark depths of Zetta's eyes, it occurred to him that he should release her. But he did not. Instead, he caught her in his arms. Lifted her up. Not, to be wholly truthful, because scientifically he wanted to test her weight. Rather was it because, at touching her, an instant of madness swept him.

It passed. She was pushing him away, smiling, startled, but unafraid. And, with the madness gone, he tossed her into the air as one would toss a child. Caught her; tossed her again to the ceiling and let her fall, to land lightly on tiptoe as her feet came down to the straw matting of the floor. And in the doorway, he became aware that Hulda was standing, silently watching them.

When father arrived at the Cains' he weighed Zetta. Had she been a normal girl of earth, by her appearance she would have weighed some ninety or a hundred pounds. Zetta weighed eighteen pounds!

There were several scientists in Porto Rico who, at father's invitation, came to

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see Zetta. They were with her hours each day. Dan and Hulda were excluded. Father's manner, Dan said, was very solemn, and he seemed to be laboring under a suppressed excitement. Then came the news of March 2, that invaders from Xenephrene had landed on the earth near New York. The scientists at the Cains' house hastened to San Juan, but father remained.

One afternoon—it was the afternoon of March 4—Hulda and Dan listened at the door when father was with Zetta. She was talking to him now! Talking in low, slow tones; haltingly, and often he would question and prompt her. Abruptly he rose to his feet and came out.

"Hulda! Dan, where are your father and mother?"

Dan called them; they came hustling in. The excitement of these days was too much for the elder Cains; they lived in a constant confusion and bewilderment.

"Sit down, all of you," father commanded. "Zetta—come out here, child."

She came at his call, wide-eyed, gentle; but she, too, was trembling with excitement. Father seated her gently on a cushion. He said:

"Our earth lashed into turmoil by this extraordinary change of climate, is far worse off than that. These invaders—well, what Zetta has to say will at least give us information—aid us in doing what we can to repel them! It is a bad condition—it may prove serious—possibly complete disaster!"

He regarded Zetta with a gentle tenderness. "This girl has come from her world to help us. Yes, she has learned our language, with what strange qualities of mind, and senses so different from ours you will be amazed to hear. A very gentle little creature. I think all of you have grown to love her—she says you have been very kind to her, and she loves you very much, particularly Hulda."

It struck Hulda with a guilty pang, hearing this after her own jealousy of Zetta; for Hulda was no more than human, and there had been days when secretly she hotly resented the strange and beautiful girl's presence in the house with Dan. But that was over. Hulda exclaimed impulsively, "I do love her!"

The two girls' glances met affectionately. "Yes," Zetta said suddenly. "We do love ver' much."

Father went on: "She is here—came here to help us. All this time, in her own way, she has been striving to learn our language that she might tell us. She has told me everything. Zetta, tell them—just what you told me—"

Father stopped his nervous pacing and sat down abruptly. And without preface, quietly, sometimes haltingly, in her strangely small voice and curiously clipped syllables, Zetta began her amazing narrative.

CHAPTER V

CRIMSON SOUND!

ON THE afternoon of March 3, Freddie and I, in Miami, were summoned by the War Department, which was installed here in temporary quarters after the flight from Washington. We were greeted by the secretary, who introduced us to a dozen or more grave-faced officials who were seated around a large table in a cold, badly illuminated room. They were under the impression that I had recently been to Porto Rico with my father; they wanted further details from me, as an eyewitness, to supplement the information which had been furnished them concerning the captive girl from Xenephrene.

I had not been to Porto Rico; I could tell them nothing, but I remained at the conference with Freddie. Of him, they wanted a demonstration of his invention. The War Secretary laughed, but it was a very hollow, mirthless laugh.

"You see, young man, we are almost in the position of grasping at straws."

By the general public, who reads of war conferences and grave official decisions given with calm dignity in times of national crisis, the inner workings of a government are never understood. The people naturally picture men of great intellect, calmly, judicially weighing problems of international law, and quietly giving their decisions, as though the whole matter were controlled by some giant, insensate machine of precision, incapable of error, undisturbed by human feeling.

It is not so. Or, at least, I can vouch for the fact that in the darkness of this afternoon of March 3, 1953, in the United States War Department at Miami, it most certainly was not so.

These gray-haired men were very human. Most were unshaved, with rumpled

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hair and reddened eyes. Distraught, harassed; undecided; doubtful of everything; striving to do the best they could, with the welfare of millions of their people at stake. Conditions of unprecedented disaster had for weeks assailed them. Under this culminating blow—invaders from another world landing to attack what was once our greatest city—they were all but broken.

Very human indeed! The Secretary of the Navy sat savagely chewing on the stump of an old cigar, blowing on his hands, cursing the cold intervals. The Air Secretary was pouring hot coffee at the end of the table, shoving a litter of papers out of his way to make room for the cups. The stooped, middle-aged, haggard gentleman-pacing the floor was our President.

"Grasping at a straw," said the War Secretary.

In a sudden silence, through an open doorway to the room adjoining, I could hear the clatter of the southern telegraphs, telephone bells, the hiss and splutter of the radio and television instruments.

"Close that door," the secretary added querulously. "You've brought your model, Smith? Put it here on the table—tell us about it."

FREDDIE opened his apparatus and explained it briefly. His so-called thermodyne principle. Though ultimately he had hoped to adapt it into a motor of revolutionary design, his present model was merely a small projector.

"Projector of what?" demanded the President irritably.

"Of heat, sir," Freddie answered. "I'll show you. This is a very small model, of course, but it demonstrates the principle."

They did not want any technicalities from Freddie. He explained only that his apparatus, in this present small form, took a tiny electric spark and built it up into a new form of radiant heat.

"It is," said Freddie, "heat of totally different properties from the kind with which we commonly deal. It travels—radiates, by the diffusion of its electrons, more like light than heat. At a great speed—I think possibly, at over a hundred thousand miles a second."

He opened his apparatus. It consisted of a small, flat, metallic box, curved to fit a man's chest. A disk, like a small electrode, to be pressed against the skin. Freddie bared his chest and strapped it on.

"I use," he said, "the tiny electrical impulse which the human body itself furnishes. This, I amplify, build up and store in a battery." Wires from the generator led to a small box which he opened to show his audience—a box of coils, and a tiny row of amplifying tubes. He put this in his pocket, with wires leading to the battery and the projector. These were both in one piece—the projector a small metallic funnel, with a trigger; a grid of wires was across its opened end; it had a long metallic handle, in the hollow interior of which was the battery where the charge was concentrated.

"Electrons of heat under pressure," said Freddie.

"Show us," said some one.

Freddie erected a screen across the room—an insulating screen to kill the heat-beam so that it could not injure the wall. The men moved aside.

Freddie, after a moment to generate and concentrate the charge, raised the muzzle.

The thing hissed slightly; a dull violet beam sprang like light from the projector. It struck the screen some twenty feet away, in a large circle of fluorescence; in the dimness of the room it seemed like phosphorescent water, landing in a spray and dissipating as it struck, like a dissolving mist.

Freddie cried, "Peter, hold something in it!"

I took a sheet of paper, held it carefully into the beam. It shriveled, blackened and burst into flame. Then a lead pencil—it melted off midway of its length as I held it up.

Freddie snapped off the apparatus. "That's all, gentlemen. With a large model, I would use a high voltage current for my original impulse, instead of the tiny impulse of the human body."

"How far will that beam carry?" the President demanded.

"This one?" Freddie asked. "Or a maximum, full-sized projector?"

"This one. Why talk about what you haven't got?"

"About thirty-five feet, sir. Further, perhaps, if I concentrate it—keep it from spreading. Say fifty feet. But at that

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distance its temperature would not be very great."

"How great?"

"Two hundred degrees Fahrenheit."

"How much is it at the muzzle?"

"About twelve hundred."

An effective range of thirty-five or fifty feet! They were all disappointed. "We can't," said the War Secretary, "figure this thing in the light of a large model we some time might be able to build. What good is that?"

The man beside me said abruptly: "This thing is useless to help us now, gentlemen. But, in the future—do you know, I wouldn't say but what this young fellow has hit upon something not unlike what our enemies seem to be using—"

The door from the adjoining room opened. A man said: "Davis has started his flight. He's almost within sight of them now—shall I bring in the screen?"

"Bring it in," said the President. "Get these lights down—put that away, Mr. Smith—we'll discuss that some other time—it's been very interesting."

Freddie hastily gathered up his apparatus. The lights in the conference room were turned out; it was illumined only by the blue reflection through the doorway. Men brought in a tel-vision screen some two feet square; placed it upright on the table and we all gathered before it. The instrument room door was closed. We were in the darkness save for the vague silver radiance that came from the screen.

FROM the whispers around me I soon knew what was transpiring. The invaders had landed on the east bank of the frozen Hudson, near the suburb of Tarrytown. Xenephrene was at its closest point to the earth now, which is what doubtless prompted the invasion. Xenephrene was passing us; beginning to-day, the distance between the worlds would grow greater.

Presumably the invaders had landed on the night of February 28. It had been snowing around New York City steadily for a week; but that night was clear. Reports said that a great silver ball had been seen floating down from the sky; later, from the ground, strange beams of colored light were seen, moving slowly southward. And strange sounds were heard.

But the information was confused and unauthentic. This last blizzard had cut off all the New York area from the world. There was practically no transportation; no wires remained standing; no radio-sending stations were operating within all that region.

How many people remained on Manhattan Island, no one could say. Very few, probably. A deserted, congealed city, snow-buried, with its huge buildings nothing now but giant monuments to a greatness which once had been. The cold was worse than scientists prognosticated. Nothing could get to New York now, save possibly dog-sleds, and the new type Arctic planes; and very few of those were available.

War against the invaders from Xenephrene!

Our government bulletins of the day had assured the public that these invaders would be held in check, attacked, held from moving further south, and very soon exterminated. What deaths to our people they had already caused, was not known. But it was evident that they were hostile; a plane carrying refugees had passed near their lights. Confused stories were told of melting, vanishing snow under red light; and stories of another refugee plane attacked and destroyed by red light and strange sound! Meaningless news! Yet terrible!

The British Empire, from its capital in North Africa, offered us aid. They were building the Arctic planes. The French government from its headquarters in Tunis, preparing to move again south to the lower Sahara, radioed its desire to help. Argentina and Chile, harassed with their own problems in the new tropic heat, wanted to help if they could.

Magnificent gestures, but they all meant very little. So far, nothing had been done. A few of our planes had ventured near New York; and none had so far been heard of since. Now, a huge Arctic plane, commanded by this Davis, equipped with modern aircraft artillery, with radio and a tel-vision image-finder, was making an experimental flight. A companion plane, flown by the famous Robinson, was with it. Robinson had the longest-range airplane gun of modern times; and he carried bombs. His purpose was to try and get above the enemy; and Davis, with his tel-vision and radio would report conditions as best he could.

This attempt, then, was what now we

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From within the cylinder one of the metal boxes was coming out! Enveloped in a vague red glow, it began moving through the air

were to witness. I have never been present at so dramatic a scene as this one which took place on the tel-vision mirror, and in the room around me.

In the darkness the silver light from the screen vaguely illumined the tense crowding figures. The highest officials of our government! No calm judicial conference here! Tired, cold, anxious men, watching and listening with bated breaths and thumping hearts. There had been a buzz of whispered comments; the shifting of chairs; shuffling of feet. But now there was silence.

The screen image blurred for a moment as it was brought in from the other room; but soon it cleared. I saw the cold, frosty stars in a field of blue-black; far below, the dim vista of gray-white snow shining in the starlight—a panorama of snow-laden country at night. The image-finder was in the front of Davis's plane, pointing diagonally downward. A swaying scene, diminished by the mirror, and by the two thousand-foot altitude at which Davis was flying.

Some one said: "Where are we? I don't recognize that landscape."

"Long Island. He's heading for New York City. Hush! We'll throw in his radio-sound." It was the voice of the War Secretary. "Grant, you said you had connection."

A man was fumbling with the miniature audiphone beside the mirror. We heard the drone of Davis's plane; and then heard his voice, with words indistinguishable as he spoke to the gunner with him.

The President's voice said nervously: "Have you sending connection? If we want to give him orders—where is the other plane? Isn't Robinson around here?"

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Grant said: "Yes. He was visible awhile ago. Davis is going to fly over New York—the enemy, he thinks, is still up in the Yonkers district."

I SAT staring at the screen. Half an hour? Or two hours? I could not have said. Swaying stars; a dim white swaying landscape. Then the horizon dropped; stars covered everything; Davis was mounting. He leveled at last.

Dimly, far down, I could see the white configurations of Long Island Sound, frozen into solid ice, white with piled snowdrifts, black where the wind had swept it bare. A blurred, shifting scene, dizzying, but sometimes steady and very clear. It tilted up—all land for a moment.

I saw, momentarily as the plane swooped down, the great bridges over the river from Long Island to Manhattan. Small as a child's toys. Broken toy bridges, with ice piled upon them; cables dangling—the older Brooklyn Bridge lay askew. A jam of river ice had wrenched at one of its piers.

It was a motionless world; the river of tangled, motionless ice-floes, the frozen, motionless bay with hulks of vessels caught in it and abandoned; and the great city—all congealed, stricken of motion in every detail.

And then we were over lower New York. The parks were wan, white blobs; the streets were black canyons; the great buildings with their archways and pedestrian levels in the crowded lower district stood like frozen headstones — Davis swooped—I saw a great office building in which, it seemed, the water system must have burst and flooded it when still there was warmth inside; its facade was a mass of ice. The plane zoomed up and only the stars were visible.

Above the motor drone from the audiphone, the President's voice said: "Ask him about Robinson. Where is he?"

Then we saw Robinson's large quadruplane with its helicopters folded, its cabin hanging like a silver bullet beneath the lower wing. It came swinging into our image from one side, and headed north into the starlight.

Abruptly we heard Davis's voice: "Above Central Park. It's piled level as an Arctic snow-field. In the lower city there seemed no lights—saw no sign of any one remaining. The enemy is in the open country up ahead—northeast of the Yonkers district—Look! There now, you see the enemy light!"

At the distant northern horizon in the background of the image, a dull radiance of red was visible. It seemed a crimson glow standing up into the sky. Not the yellow of a reflected conflagration, but red—crimson red.

"Blood!" murmured the man beside me. "Crimson stain—"

Davis's voice was saying: "I'll keep in sight of Robinson. He's mounting. I'm cutting out my connection with you now—except the image and the continuous one-way sound. You'll hear and see better. Hear and see all that we do—I can begin to hear it now. Good-by to you all."

His voice broke with the snap that indicated his connection was off. The War Secretary cried: "Grant! Stop him! We must be able to talk with him—give him orders! That fool—daredevil—he's likely to do anything just so we may see and hear as much as possible!"

But the connection was broken. Davis, with that ominous, significant "Good-by to you all," had cut out so that we might see and hear in full volume. We could no longer communicate with him.

The mirror was brighter and clearer with its greater power; the drone of the motors came louder; and then dimmed suddenly as Davis evidently threw in his mufflers.

In the sielnce now, we heard another sound. The sound of the enemy! The sound of that crimson radiance in the sky ahead! A low whine. It did not seem electrical. A whine—more like a giant animal in distress.

I listened, with a shudder thrilling me; and I know that every man in the room must have felt the same. A queer thrilling shudder, as though the very sound itself were physically affecting me with its vibrations. It was very soft, now at first; and I was only hearing the faint, radio echo of it; yet upon my senses it laid a singularly weird, uncanny feeling of the diabolical.

THE minutes passed. As the plane flew northward, the crimson stain in the sky seemed spreading. And the whine increased; grew louder, resolved itself now into a myriad undertones. Cries, muffled, faint, aerial, yet somehow clear; screams, checked and then begun again; a low, tiny throbbing—a myriad unearth-

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ly sounds, weirdly abnormal, like nothing I had ever heard before, all blended as undertones to the one great whine.

The crimson radiance, screaming into the night! Light and sound intermingled. Was this some strange weapon of a strange science which the invaders from Xenephrene had brought to attack us? There was something deadly in the aspect of that crimson radiance. And something equally lethal in the gruesome sound which split the night around it.

My thoughts were whirling in this fashion when I heard the muttered words of the man next to me—murmuring to the man on his other side, "That's weird! Vanderstuyft says that the girl from Xenephrene can see and hear below the human scale! This is it—the infra-red made visible, and its sounds brought up to our human ears! Weird—"

Some one else was asking: "Is that light and that sound their weapon? Where's the Robinson plane?"

And the War Secretary said: "Hush! He's there — ahead. We're mounting."

Nothing but sky again. A blood-red, night sky. The stars gleamed like crimson jewels through the radiance. Then again, the Davis plane leveled. We saw now that the invaders evidently were encamped in a snowy stretch of what had been comparatively open country. The houses which once were there, lay now under mounds of snow. A blank rolling landscape; fences, roads, all gone beneath the billowing blanket of white; the trees only were left, stark black sticks in patches.

In an oval, perhaps a mile across its greatest diameter, the red beam stood up into the sky. A barrage of crimson—not light, but sound! It throbbed and screamed and whined its defiance!

The two planes circled the radiance, some ten thousand feet up, and several miles away. The Davis plane fired a shell; we heard the dull muffled report, saw a yellow glare where it struck the red beam and harmlessly exploded. But it struck low, where perhaps the sound-vibrations were too intense.

The planes mounted higher. We could see Robinson's ahead and above us! He was closer to the crimson barrage. Trying to climb over it—to drop a bomb.

From this greater height, within the oval other lights showed, far down on the snow. Tiny moving spots of vivid color. The enemy's encampment. Davis was now at least at the twenty thousand foot level. Robinson was still higher. In that deadly cold it seemed incredible; but still they struggled up.

At this height the crimson barrage was thin; once, overhead, I seemed to see where it ended. The whine of it was fainter, but every gruesome undertone still sounded clear.

"He's trying it!" The man beside me blurted it aloud. Startled movement sounded in the room; a chair pushed back with a rasp; tense murmurs; shuffling feet. We stared. Robinson's plane darted in—

There was just an instant when I thought it was safely through. I could see it clearly—the black outline of a bird stained crimson. It seemed to hang motionless; then it fluttered; falling—and as it fell, like a mist of black vapor it suddenly expanded; a black wraith of a plane expanding, dissipating. It did not seem to reach the ground. It was gone, dissolved into nothing visible, with only a howling, mouthing sound from the crimson monster to mark its passing!

A shiver swept me; I was cold, trembling. I heard some one near me cry in horror: "Davis, he's—" and check himself. The screen was a blur of crimson, with lurid spots of light on the ground showing through it. Davis was heading downward in a swoop through the red beam! It spread until the whole image before us was a crimson stain.

The lights on the ground seemed coming up, leaping up, growing in size as the plane dived at them. The room was a chaos of gruesome tiny screams! We were in the crimson! It snapped with a myriad sparks. It howled, squealed, screamed! An instant, but it seemed an eternity. Then the red vanished. We were through it! By Heaven, through it! Safely through! Diving at the ground!

I saw that one of the spots of light had broadened to a green ghastly glare on the snow-surface. Figures of men in human form standing there, fore-shortened by the overhead perspective to huge heads and dwindling bodies. Human forms; men of almost naked bodies, standing in the snow, bodies painted green by the glare. Apparatus of war erected in the snow—a bare spot where the snow was gone, and rock and earth showed clean—a shimmer that seemed a pool of water lying warm with ice around it.

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A glimpse—no more than a second or two undoubtedly. Then the scene, rushing upward, was fading. The confusion of sounds and blurred lights suddenly grew faint—faded—vanished into darkness and silence!

The tel-vision screen was dead—a blank silver surface staring at us like a corpse. The audiphone was mute.

Davis's plane had vanished like its fellow into nothingness before it reached the ground!

This was the afternoon of the 3rd of March. That night, while Freddie and I were at our boarding place, the news reached us that a silver ball of invaders from Xenephrene had landed in the twilight of the Venezuelan coast—the heart of the region which in all our western hemisphere we had come to prize most dearly!

CHAPTER VI

"IF I HAD BUT KNOWN!"

"LOOK here, young man," said the War Secretary, "can you operate a plane of the Arctic A type?"

I could, and so could Freddie, I said. The War Secretary continued his pacing of the room. It was about nine o'clock of the morning of March 15—black as midnight outdoors; cold, with clouds scudding low over the Florida keys, clouds which promised snow. The War Secretary had sent for us.

Conditions were worse everywhere, it seemed now by this morning's news—as though each day brought its disasters worse than any which had gone before. The invaders from Xenephrene were obviously almost impregnable to our attack. The efforts of Robinson and Davis had proved it, if nothing else. It was obvious also that the invaders at New York City so far had made no offensive move. Their barrage—the crimson howling sound, or light, whatever it might be—was merely their defense.

"Heaven knows," the secretary exclaimed, "what weapons they may have to loose when they begin an attack!"

And now, another huge silver ball had landed in Venezuela—on the coastal plain near La Guayra. In the deserted frozen wastes of New York State the invaders were not an immediate, serious menace. But in Venezuela it was a far different condition.

La Guayra was the main receiving port for all our refugee ships. A twilight had fallen there, but the temperature still was mild. It was colder up in Caracas, but the people thronged there, and with heroic efforts the Government and the citizens were doing their best to receive them.

It was not a wholly unselfish effort. With the new climate, Colombia, Venezuela, the former jungles of the Amazon basin of Brazil; Ecuador, Peru, even the mountain fastnesses of Bolivia, and the arid coast of north Chile—this was the land of promise. It was the best, the only tolerable all-year climate left to the Western World. Here the new great cities would spring up—centers of industry and commerce; here would be the new great fields of grain; the cattle ranges.

But here, in the midst of the confusion of arriving settlers, the enemy from Xenephrene had landed! We had no details; we only knew that around the silver ball a barrage of red howling sound was standing up into the sky. Within that circular mile of the red barrage, all that had been evidence of our human life—houses, trees, people—all was vanished!

The War Secretary stopped before me. "I've radioed your father this morning, Peter. Told him to send that Xenephrene girl up here to us at once! We've got to do something. We must learn if we can what these unearthly enemies are like—do scientifically what we can to oppose them."

He gestured at me vehemently. "You Hollanders are very stubborn, young Peter. Your father told me he was very busy—he'd have full information for me in a day or two! That's the scientist for you! Taking it methodically, with that damn scientific routine, when a day or two is an eternity just now!"

I regarded Freddie. We did not smile; in these terrible days there was not a smile left in us. But Freddie nodded.

"That's father's way," I said. "But—"

"Well, I told him I was sending a special plane down there at once to get him and the girl. The Venezuelan Government is demanding details of us. Every thirty minutes Caracas calls me up. Makes a fool of us—a girl of this unknown enemy race right in our hands and we don't produce her! Your father said, 'Good! Send Peter and young Fred

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Smith—I want to see them anyway.'"

There was nothing that could have pleased Freddie and myself better. The secretary offered us a pilot, but we did not want one. We started that morning, armed with legal papers, given us jocularly, but with serious intent, nevertheless, and commanding father's presence with Zetta in Miami the next day.

IT WAS eleven o'clock when we got away in the big Arctic A plane. A black morning with swift, low clouds, and a wind from the north. Flying southeast, we had scarcely left the Bahamas behind us when the weather cleared. Cold starlight shone on a dark, cold ocean. Icebergs had been seen down this far, but we did not chance to pass any now. But we saw many scurrying steamships.

In some four hours we raised the Morrow light of San Juan and I turned southwest, to strike the coast beyond Arecibo. Flying low, we headed in, over the line of breakers on the white beach. Columbus landed near here, not so many lifetimes ago. Yet how different was the world then!

The tumbled mountains rising behind the sea which Columbus had described to Isabella rose before us now. The same shape; every tiny peak undoubtedly the same. But they were not the vivid warm green which had so enchanted the mariner. These were cold and blue gray, and the tops of them were white with snow.

It was mid-afternoon when, in the darkness, we dropped with a roar upon Dan's landing stage at the foot of the knoll. We leaped from the plane and hurried up the hill, to see Dan and father, and Hulda and the Cains waving at us from the veranda, and a small, strange white figure of a girl standing among them.

If one could only glimpse the future, even for a brief moment! It makes me shudder sometimes to think how blindly we are forced to tread our way through life, raising each foot without the knowledge of what will happen before it reaches the ground! That afternoon, for instance, I was very happy to burst in upon father and Dan. If Freddie and I had known what was impending, we would have done anything rather than arrive at that moment. If we had delayed our arrival even an hour! Yet, even in a seeming tragedy, there is evidence of some all-guiding purpose. We may not see it, we may deny it, but I think that always it is there.

We came upon the plantation house within a moment after Zetta had begun her narration. She had told it to father; she was beginning it for Dan and the others, when the sound of our arriving plane checked her.

The few remaining hours of that afternoon and evening were crowded with the confusion of our arrival, our exchange of news and ideas, and listening to the world news from the radio. Zetta did not tell her story that afternoon or that evening. Father, with a quizzical smile, looked over the legal papers with which we served him.

"Good enough, boys! I'll obey. We'll take Zetta and go up to Miami tomorrow morning." He turned to Dan. "You come with us. Zetta will tell her story to the authorities in Miami, just as she's told it to me. And I'll have some interesting scientific data for them, I promise you."

He gestured with a voluminous sheaf of papers—his scientific notes on Zetta's narrative and on the girl's mental and physical being. He gestured with the papers and then stuck them back in his pocket. Fate! Providence! Call it what you will. He did not hand them to Dan or to Freddie or to me—he stuck them back in his pocket!

The news of Hulda's and Dan's engagement brought me pleasure. I shook Dan's hand warmly and kissed my sister as she flung herself into my arms. Little Hulda was radiant. Dan's handsome, tanned face was flushed as he received our congratulations; and when they were over, he stood towering over Hulda, with his arms around her as she clung to him.

Happy lovers, snatching at their happiness even in the midst of the world's turmoil! Happy that afternoon and evening.

I SHALL never forget my meeting with Zetta as they introduced me to her that afternoon. She stood in the center of the room, and something momentarily diverted the rest of them from us; for an instant we were alone. I stared at her.

What futile words of greeting I may have uttered I do not know, and I think that she said nothing. I saw a quaintly beautiful young girl, curiously different in a way not to be defined from any girl I had ever before beheld. A strange,

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weird beauty. I took her hand as she held it out in the gesture they had taught her.

I have mentioned Dan's feelings under similar circumstances. Dan was in love with Hulda; the instinct of all that was upright and true within him rose to cast out this surge of alien emotion. Not so with me—I was wholly fancy free.

I took Zetta's hand. It seemed then as though the contact might suddenly become beyond my power to break. Her gaze held mine. I saw a sudden startled look in her eyes, and then saw something else—the mirrored play of emotions like my own.

Her body seemed to sway toward me; I could see and feel her withstanding its sway. An attraction between us. Do I mean that literally? Scientifically? I do not know. There is, perhaps, between the sexes on earth such an attraction. Or it may perchance be psychological, emotional, nothing more.

I felt it with Zetta, and I could see that she felt it and was startled. But in her eyes there was more than surprise—a swift melting look of tenderness.

Mrs. Cain bustled up to us. "Isn't she a darling little thing, Peter? We all love her. Oh, dear me, these terrible, strange times!"

Our hands broke apart. Was it love we had felt in that instant? Could love be possible, could it be right between a man and a woman so different? Does the Creator intend the worlds thus to be joined, or is the isolation He has imposed upon each of them an evidence that such cannot be?

Love between Zetta and me? I do not know. But all that afternoon and evening, I found my eyes turning to her, and found her somber gaze upon me.

We chanced to approach each other several times, and always I was conscious of the attraction of her nearness. Not so strong as at first. All my instinct, my reason, was prepared for it now; a thousand barriers of conventionality and time and place and circumstance contributed subconsciously to resist it. But it was there, invisibly, intangibly holding us.

THE evening's radio news brought a measure of relief to the world. From New York came the report that the invaders had vanished. Moved somewhere else, perhaps—but where it was not known.

Father made one comment; his words, which proved to be true enough, linger clear in my memory. "They left New York yesterday afternoon, after the attack by Robinson and Davis. There are not two vehicles—only one! It left New York and landed last night in Venezuela! It may leave there presently." His glance turned to Zetta. "I have reason to think that the invaders will voluntarily withdraw from the earth. Very soon, I imagine—while Xenephrene is still comparatively near us."

True enough! At midnight that night the radio told us that the Xenephrene vehicle, with all its people, had left Venezuela. The night was heavily overcast, with a rain and wind storm all up through Central America and the lower Caribbean; and north of sixteen degrees there was snow. Where the invaders had gone, no one knew. The world was anxiously awaiting news of their next landing place.

We sat up for perhaps an hour. It was snowing outside, with a howling wind that swirled the snow about the eaves of the little plantation house. At about one o'clock we all bade each other good night and went to bed.

Ah, if we had but known!

I awoke to find Freddie shaking me. He and I had slept together. It was four in the morning, and the house was noisy with the storm outside. Freddie was alarmed—he did not know why. Something had awakened him—we decided it was a thumping which we now heard in the living room, a door banging in the wind, with a queer, broken rattle to it.

There is a sense of evil which comes to any one awakened unexpectedly in the night. I felt it very strongly now. And Freddie's face was very white and solemn in the glow of the night light which he had switched on.

"The door to the porch," I said. "It's blown open—it's banging."

We went out to close it. The living room was very cold; snow was blowing in through the outer doorway. We turned on the light. The door was not only open, it was hanging askew, half torn from its hinges. More than that, part of its wooden framework was gone. Not broken—vanished—as if melted off. A leprous wreck of a door, hanging there, banging with a thump and rattle in the wind!

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It was night on this moonlit side of Xenephrene as we dropped down toward it. The sun was hidden behind the planet and the moon blazed up through the glass floor of our space ship in all its purple glory

No need to tell us what had happened —I think we both knew then. The door to father's bedroom stood open. He was not there. The bed had been occupied; there was no sign of a struggle, no abnormal disorder anywhere about the house, except for that dismembered front door, which had been locked.

Our light and our voices awakened Dan and his parents. They came out from their rooms. But Hulda did not come, nor Zetta! Their bedroom doors, like father's stood open; but the occupants were gone.

Horrified moments followed, during which we searched the house and the buildings near it. There was no evidence of any kind of how, in the noisy night, while the rest of us slept, father, Hulda and Zetta had been spirited away.

The terrified elder Cains remained in the house. Hastily dressing, Dan, Freddie and I rushed to the corral. The chilled little ponies welcomed us. We saddled, and in single file, slowly against the wind and driving snow, we rode out into the night.

There was no surprise left for us when we reached the "Eden tract" in the valley by the caves where once the Cains' treasured fruit trees had grown so luxuriantly. It was all a dim gray expanse of snow, with the naked tree branches showing in black, forlorn rows.

The trunks of the coconut trees stood like huge black sticks in a patch of white. But among them there was no small silver vehicle. The guards had been withdrawn a week before. There was no evidence here of anything.

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The heavy falling snowflakes would have covered up even recent footprints; there was only the depression in the sand and snow to mark where the vehicle had been.

The last communication was broken. The last remaining evidence of Xenephrene upon our earth was gone!

CHAPTER VII

MYSTERIOUS STAR, IMPERTURBABLY SHINING!

MORE than twice seventeen months went by. For me and for Dan the progress of the world, it seemed then, must always be in cycles of seventeen months. That is the length of time which Xenephrene took periodically to overtake and pass us in our orbit. Almost between us and the sun, every seventeen months; and at such times she was at her closest points to us, some sixteen to nineteen million miles away. Not very far, in terms of astronomical measurement, but to Dan and me very far indeed.

Two of these passings came and went. We had hoped there might be some sign from Xenephrene; even something hostile would had seemed to us better than nothing. Dan and I often sat in the night, gazing at the great purple-white star.

Romantic, mysterious world, imperturbably blazing up there! It held captive for Dan the woman he loved; for me, a beloved sister and my dear father. Held them captive—if indeed they were alive, which is the best we could hope—held them, and it gave no sign! Beautiful, mysterious world—and sinister! Gazing up at it, my fancy roamed.

What strange sights and sounds and beings were there! We had had but a little glimpse, no more—and then it was snatched away.

It is not important now for me to recount what these months brought on earth. The adjustment to new conditions, new climate, new night and day. Volumes of history describe it fully—the myriad shifting events over the world's great surface, the new nations, new mingling of races—everything new, it would seem. Everything but human nature, the old characteristics, love, hate, jealousy, friendship, greed, envy—nothing on earth has ever changed them, and nothing will.

We did not know why father, Hulda and Zetta were abducted; but that they were captured by the invaders and with them returned to Xenephrene we felt sure. Why the invaders came at all, and then so hastily withdrew, we could not guess. Zetta knew, and she had told father. But the secret went with them. Perhaps, we decided, the Creator intends this veil of mystery between the worlds. If that thought could be spiritual consolation to Dan and me, we tried to make the most of it.

Dan was distracted. Vainly he and I sought some way by which we might get to Xenephrene. It seemed impossible. Before that terrible winter when what they now call the "Great Change" began, any serious talk of going to a neighbor planet was always laughed at. But no one laughed now.

Scientists told Dan and me that at present, for us of earth, the thing was impossible. If father had left his notes, perhaps, instead of putting them in his pocket that fatal afternoon; if some vestige of apparatus had been left behind by the invaders; if only we still had even a portion of the mechanism of Zetta's small vehicle, that our scientists might study it, try to learn its secret— Ah, those ifs! They are all encompassed in the one phrase, which each of us mortals at one time or another in life has murmured sadly: "If only I had known!"

I was far older now in spirit than that winter thirty-five months before. We do not age in regular progression, but in spurts of stressed mental and physical suffering. I aged, for though I lost a sister and father, something else I lost, less tangible but unforgettable. The girl Zetta—the loss of what might have been, for me and for her.

Love born of a glance, now to stay with me always? It was not that. I was not so youthful that I could cherish such romantic illusion.

But this I knew. Something, that memorable afternoon when she and I first joined glances, sprang into being. As though over the gap from one world to another, from a man to a woman and back again, it sprang and clung reluctant to be broken. And it left its mark upon my mind and spirit. It was not to be; I believed that fully. But, it had been, the consciousness was within me that it would have been a thing very beautiful.

And I was older; and, I think, a better man, just for the memory.

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Thirty-five months! A dreary, hopeless interval to Dan and me. Dreary, for in the midst of all the world's turmoil we seemed to stand apart; not actors, spectators merely, with our minds and spirits up there where the great purple star was shining. Thirty-five hopeless months, for it seemed that what we had lost was forever gone.

On February 4, 1956, Dan and I were living in Porto Rico. Freddie was in Miami. Father's post in Southern Chile was taken by one of his fellow scientists. The world rolls on! Father was lost, his post filled, and himself almost forgotten. How fatuously we mortals attach importance to ourselves! We strut our little moment upon the stage, some in the spotlight, some shrinking in the shadows by the back drop. We miss our cues, fumble, and are abashed or terrified. But in a moment no one cares. The curtain rings down; up again, with the old play, but new scenes and other actors; and the changing audience forgets we ever were on the stage at all.

Father's post was filled. Freddie and I had been down there in Chile one summer, but we did not like it and we came back. Summer! The very word had lost its meaning. They were beginning now to call it the Day.

WE CAME back in June, chasing the daylight, and located in Porto Rico. Dan and his father were engaging in the new agriculture. The daylight and twilight months in the West Indies were found favorable for the raising of vegetables. Every one was groping. What could or could not be done was as yet scarcely known. But it promised to be a profitable business. Food of any kind, anywhere in the world, at any time, found a ready market. All the world governments were engaged in its purchase, its storage, and its distribution.

A new era was beginning; and in it some saw a more rational order than in the old. I am no economist; yet now I could see quite clearly the fallacy of much that the world had previously thought was best. Tariff walls between the nations were gone now. The world in its necessity became one big family, working to maintain itself as best it could.

In the daylight in Porto Rico, we were raising vegetables to feed the people who were living in the darkness and cold of the south. Six months later, they would be doing the same for us.

It is not my purpose to indulge in economic theories here, though Dan and I often discussed them. Freddie was not interested. We wanted him with us; but though he came to Porto Rico, he stayed in San Juan, often going up to Miami. The National Capital was still there; and Freddie had interested the government in his invention.

The world catastrophe had brought a great stimulus to scientific invention. New devices, born of the necessity of totally new world conditions, were being developed. Every government was ready to help with funds. Freddie had perfected his motor, financed by our government.

More important than that, however, they were interested in producing his heat-ray projector in more powerful form. His new projector, he told us, was very nearly ready. Not for war purposes, of course. With characteristic thoughtlessness, the world had already almost forgotten the brief invasion from Xenephrene. Such a thing as that naturally could never happen again. And after what the world had been through, war between our own races was unthinkable.

Freddie's heat-ray, he said, would be used in the six months' Night against the cold. It had a myriad uses. With it, a ship might blaze a path down a frozen river. Water power might be utilized further into the long Night; why, a city might even be sprayed with its beams and be kept spring-like despite the cold! Visions! But by such visions science moves ahead into the realism of achievement!

That long Night of '55 and '56 Dan and I spent housed in, with the comparative comfort of our newly rebuilt and heated plantation house. Throughout January and February it snowed heavily; the tumbled little mountains of Porto Rico were solid white.

Sometimes the leaden sky would clear; the stars and moon would glitter on the snow, so bright one could almost read outdoors. Our winter moon was magnificent. The moon's orbit about the earth was very little changed from before; its plane had shifted with us, scientists said, and the moon was pursuing very nearly its old path relative to us.

Dan and I had a small Arctic A flyer, and sleighs. We did not use the plane

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much. The indolence of the long night of enforced idleness was upon us. Most of the world was learning how to work hard in the daylight months, and to do nothing gracefully through the months of darkness. We read our books; listened to the radio; studied, planned and talked.

It would have been very pleasant, had there not been that constant sense of what we had lost. Father, Hulda—and Zetta. I had spoken very little of Zetta to Dan. The dreams of what might have been, were my own; even with him, I could not share them.

And then came February 4, 1956. The long night was fully upon us, the twilight days were passed—midwinter was in early April. Dan and I had been out after breakfast for a drive in the sleigh. We had returned for luncheon with Dan's parents; and I was on the veranda, enveloped in furs, pacing up and down in the snow. Dan, with his cigar, came out and joined me.

There is sometimes a very queer directness to the fate which governs our lives—and a very great unexpectedness. We walk in the dark, with an open road or a chasm yawning before us, all unaware of which it may be. Or we may be standing at the threshold of a shining garden of hope and happiness, walking in the dark toward its gate, with heavy heart because we do not see it, or realize it is there.

Dan and I were like that now. January, 1956, had been the second time that Xenephrene passed at its closest point to earth. We had hoped that something might happen to give us news of father. But nothing did.

Gradually our hope had been dying. The January days dragged through their brief twilights into the solid winter night. We gave up hope. Xenephrene was drawing ahead of the earth again, with millions of miles of lengthening distance between the worlds. No sign from the great purple star; and we both felt that now all hope of hearing from father was gone.

Thoughts like these possessed me as I paced the veranda that afternoon. They were in Dan's mind too, I am sure; but when he joined me we neither of us spoke of them.

IT WAS clear and cold. The snow on the veranda crunched and creaked under our tread. Beyond the incongruous coconut railing the knoll-top showed white, with a blue-white beam of light from one of the side windows slanting out on it. There was no moon; a deep purple sky, with the sharply glittering silver stars. To the south, below the horizon, we knew that the sun at this hour was hovering. But it was too far down even to pale the stars now. Xenephrene was down there near it, invisible to us of the north—

Dan and I paced in silence; or talked idly of the now commonplace things of the new era of our world.

"They claim they can keep the falls of the Iguazu open all year," said Dan. "And send the power by radio—even up as far as here."

The distribution of electric current by wireless had been greatly improved recently. It seemed really practical now. In a few years Niagara, in the Day, might supply power and light to the dark, frozen cities of the south throughout their Night.

There had been most disastrous floods throughout the world when, with the coming daylight, the snow and ice had melted. Watercourses were unable to handle the sudden, abnormal flow.

But new channels were forming; nature and man alike were making adjustments to the new conditions.

"If they could send us heat from the south," said Dan. "I mean direct, natural heat. These new transformers of the power-waves may be all right, but—"

"Freddie can—I don't mean send it, but produce it, at any rate—"

"Some day," said Dan, "we'll be able to spray all our land here with that contrivance of his. Hah! That would be a great idea, wouldn't it?" He chuckled with an ironical gibe at the absent Freddie; but still he was more than half serious.

"Imagine us, Peter, getting out in the June twilight, helping the snow to melt by spraying it with heat—warming up the frozen soil, getting it plowed and planted a month earlier. If we could get our perishable vegetables down to the Argentine ahead of the others, they would bring mighty big prices—I was reading what might be done with tomatoes, Peter—"

He checked himself abruptly, gripped my arm with a force that whirled me around. We stood at the veranda rail.

"Heavens, Peter, look at that!"

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From overhead near the zenith, a shooting star came blazing down. I had never seen one so brilliant. A great yellow-red ball of fire, with a flame of tail. It seemed to take long seconds as it soundlessly fell across the sky before us—down with a blaze to the northern horizon where the Caribbean lay, a dim, dark purple in the starlight.

We breathed again. "That didn't burn itself out," said Dan. "I'll wager that was a meteorite—actually came down somewhere—"

"Northwest," I said. "Florida way. It certainly seemed close to us, didn't it?"

We went back to our pacing. There was nothing particularly unusual in seeing a meteor fall across the sky. But we were both silent, wondering. We had caught just a glimpse of the gateway to our renewed hope; we did not know it, but we both sensed it.

An hour passed. From within the house, old man Cain called, "Oh, Dan—come here, listen to this."

The radio announcer was relaying an item from Curaçao. In the twilight at Willamstadt they had seen what seemed to be a meteorite fall into the sea near the Venezuelan coast.

"Another!" exclaimed Dan.

An hour later, still another meteorite was reported. It had fallen somewhere in the region of Victoria Nyanza—in the lake, perhaps, or along its shores.

Still, this seemed nothing remarkable. But about five o'clock the radio-phone rang with our private call. It was Freddie, in Miami. The gateway to our hopes swung wide to receive us. Dan answered the call; I stood at his elbow, trembling with excitement—at first premonitory, then justified.

In the silence I could hear the tiny sound of Freddie's voice.

"Oh, Dan? Dan Cain?"

"Yes. That you, Freddie?"

"Yes. Listen—I'm in Miami. A meteorite fell—they've got it—Okechobee region. Listen—it cracked open. Was pretty well burned—but a big one. Hollow inside! They cracked into it—they found—Oh, Dan, they phoned me from Moorehaven just a little while ago. They"—Freddie's voice broke with his excitement.

"They—what, Freddie? Take it easy—can't understand you."

"I'm coming, Dan. By plane—I'll get away about eight o'clock. Peter there? Good! See you about midnight—soon as they bring it here to me, I'll bring it to you."

"Bring what? What, Freddie?"

"The cylinder. Whatever it is—haven't seen it. They're bringing it—they've got it. Heat-proof, insulated metal cylinder—they say it's engraved 'Peter Vanderstuyft, Porto Rico—Rush.' I'm bringing it, Dan. Tell Peter. It's a message from Xenephrene! It must be! A message from Peter's father!"

CHAPTER VIII

FROM ACROSS THE VOID

WE HELPED Freddie unload the cylinder from his plane. He arrived about midnight, flying alone with his precious burden. It was a cylindrical metal container, some ten feet long by three feet in diameter—a strange looking, purple-brown metal, smooth and shining like burnished copper. White metal handles were on the cylinder—and down one of its bulging sides was crudely engraved the inscription "Peter Vanderstuyft, Porto Rico. Rush."

The thing weighed perhaps two hundred pounds. It was warm, yet clammy to the touch, as though sweating. And though it appeared smooth, under my finger tips I could feel that it was pitted and scarred—blistered as though by tremendous heat.

We labored up the hill with it, and deposited it on the floor in the Cain's living room, gathering over it, wondering how it might be opened. The message from Xenephrene! It had come at last; and abruptly I seemed to feel that this was not remarkable. We had been waiting for it; and here it was, at our feet here, strangely fashioned—mute, but waiting passively to give up its secret.

We were all trembling. Freddie had discarded his furs and helmet, but his hands were stiff with the cold.

"How do we get into it? They didn't want to open it—I didn't try either. It's the message, Peter."

Dan was on the floor beside the cylinder, running his hands over its surface. His father and mother crowded upon him. Old man Cain's jaw was dropped with his awe; Mrs. Cain chattered, "Land sakes! What next! Dan, what is it? Is it from Professor Vanderstuyft? Is he all right? And dear little Hulda? She's all right, isn't she, Dan? That's what

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this means, doesn't it? My heavens, these queer times that have come to the world—"

Dan jumped to his feet. "Yes, mother, that's what we hope it means." He kissed her; pushed her away; firm, but very gentle. "You go to bed, mother. Father, you go too. We'll be working here some hours—in the morning we'll tell you all about it."

Freddie, Dan and I were left alone. The double doors and double windows were closed against the cold; a broad coal fire burned in the grate; the room was warm and silent; and blue with the light-tube, which cast its beam down upon the cylinder. Freddie said, with a hush in his voice: "We'd have been afraid to try and open it anyway, in Miami. You—you don't suppose it would explode if we pound at it, do you?"

The sweating thing was strangely sinister, for all its friendly inscription. Dan was again bending over it. Freddie added:

"It was in a meteorite—some strange rock, or metal. Evidently not natural—artificially made. It was burned, fused and shapeless by the heat of its fall through our atmosphere. You can see where the heat has burned into the cylinder—"

"Hush!" said Dan abruptly. "Listen!"

With our ears close to the metal a tiny hum was audible. The thing was humming inside. Alive! Vibrant! Humming with that strange, almost gruesome whine which brought to my memory the crimson sound of the Xenephrene invaders when Robinson and Davis had attacked them.

It was half an hour before, with the utmost caution, we got the cylinder open. Upon one of its sides we found four slightly raised circles and four small depressions, numbered from one to eight. And the words, crudely scratched on the metal, "Peter, press one, three, five and eight."

A lid came off. We had not seen the cracks where it fitted. It stuck, fused by heat; but we carefully forced it, and at length it came away.

The human mind is subject to queer vagaries. There was just an instant, as we lifted the metal panel, that there flashed to me the vague horror that this was a coffin; that we were about to behold a corpse—wrapped and sent to us like a mummy. Hulda! Zetta! A ghastly gibe, sent to mock us from this sinister unknown world!

"Ah!" breathed Dan. My leaping heart quieted; but the cold sweat stood in beads on my forehead from those fleeting, horrible fancies.

THE interior of the cylinder was divided into orderly compartments. Metal boxes; cones; cubes of metal; diaphragms; coils of white wire—packed, wrapped and lashed in orderly array; each piece seemingly set in springs to absorb the landing shock. A white lining was inside the cylinder, smooth as mica—insulation against the heat, perhaps. A strange, vague odor arose; and we could hear the humming now more plainly. It seemed to come from several metal globes the size of a man's head. Dead black metal; four or five of them were packed near the center of the cylinder. Around them a dim radiance was hovering.

"Wait!" admonished Dan. "Take it easy!" Freddie, in his excitement, would have begun rummaging. "Wait! There must be some instructions somewhere. Don't touch anything until you know what you're doing."

We found the box of instructions; it was, indeed, the most prominent thing before us, though we had overlooked it—a flat metal case some twelve inches square and half as thick, packed edgewise. Clipped to its top was a white roll of what seemed paper.

Dan gingerly removed it; unrolled it—a translucent white animal skin, possibly. And with writing on it! Ah! At last the doubts and fears that were within us all were dispelled. Father's handwriting—his firm, smooth unhurried script.

"To my son, Peter Vanderstuyft. In Porto Rico care of Ezra John Cain, or the Amalgamated Broadcasters' Association, United States of America. Please forward at once."

And then the words: "Peter, detailed instructions inside. We are safe—your father, Hulda and Zetta."

Ah! Zetta! The gates to the shining garden were swung wide for me then! Zetta!

We sat around the table under the blue light tube with father's communication, which we found inside the flat metal case, spread before us. A voluminous manuscript—nearly a hundred handwritten pages. Part of it was an all too

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"Here we are," father told us. "This is 'Under Gardens'—it is our home. You might almost think we were back on Earth, mightn't you?"

brief letter; then there were pages of instructions, scientific data, notes and diagrams. We glanced at them hurriedly, and in a voice which in spite of me I could not hold steady, I read the letter aloud to Dan and Freddie.

Under Gardens, Xenephrene,
Earth-date, January, 1956.

Peter, I trust and pray that this, or one of its duplicates which I am dispatching, may reach you. I am launching five cylinders. Any one of them will answer the purpose, but if you can possess yourself of more than one, so much the better. I suggest, before you read further, that you guard against taking any stranger into the confidence of this communication. I ex- Smith and Dan Cain. I want them with you to read this; I know that I can depend upon them both, as I can upon you, my son.

I glanced up from the page to the solemn, intent faces of Freddie and Dan. Neither spoke. Freddie's face was flushed with excitement; his breath came fast between parted lips. But Dan was pale and grim; his lean brown fingers gripped the table edge with whitened knuckles. There was a brief silence.

"Go on," said Dan tensely.

I went back to the page. "He wants secrecy." Unconsciously I lowered my voice. Freddie swung to the radio table to verify that the lever of the outgoing audiphone was well off.

I went on reading:

If this should fall into other hands than those of my son, I beg that you who read it will read no further than this paragraph. Or, if you do, that loyalty to your nation—to your world—will bid you

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hold it secret. And if you value your own welfare—the very lives of all those who are most dear to you—at once you will deliver this cylinder and its contents intact to the government of the United States of America, with instructions that my son, Peter Vanderstuyft, of the Amalgamated Broadcasters Association be located, and the cylinder delivered to him. Or to Frederick Smith, Royal Dutch Astronomical Bureau, Anco, Chile; or to Daniel J. Cain, Factor, Porto Rico.

Peter, there is much that I would tell you—but I have no time now. We are safe. Hulda and Zetta are with me, and well. I have been ill, but am better now. The things, Peter, that I have seen and done! To name them, even if I could find the words, would be to no purpose.

I am trying to communicate with you—and Dan and Frederick—to allay your immediate fears for our safety. But more than that, Peter! The threat against our earth—as we saw it thirty-four months ago—is far greater now! For that, I would caution you—or any one loyal to earth who may read this—of the necessity for secrecy.

Enemies of earth—of a character, a plane of being, oh, Peter, you could not guess—may be on earth now. I do not know. I fear they are. Some may have made the trip at the conjunction of seventeen months ago. We suspect they did. Or if not, we fear some may be embarking from here now.

Guard yourself from them with secrecy of your actions and a constant watchfulness. I can suggest no other ways. If I could come to you—if I could bring Hulda back to you—I would make the trip instead of sending this message. But we cannot, or at least I think it would not be advisable.

I am needed here. Needed by this world—by all in it which stands for right and justice and adherence to the laws of the Almighty God who rules all of us of every world. And I think also that the welfare of our beloved earth can best be safeguarded by my remaining here for the present.

I will come to the point, Peter. There is so much for me to set down beyond a mere letter to you with explanations which well may wait until later. I want you here, Peter! And—if they think it advisable to trust their lives to such an adventure—I want Dan and Frederick to come with you. Will you come!

I ask you as though I were inviting you across one of our little oceans at home! Yet I—so much more fully than yourselves—realize what this is that I so casually ask! You are young—all three of you—and the spirit of adventure and recklessness runs high in healthy youth. I am playing upon it. I need not ask. I know you will come, if—as I pray may be the case—I have now provided you with the means—

My hand holding his written page was shaking. Freddie burst out, with a return of his old boyish enthusiasm, "I should say we would come. What a question!" I heard Dan murmur: "At last!"

Within me was a surge of emotion. A thrill of exaltation, mingled perhaps with a thrill of fear at the unknown crowding now so close upon me. And the thought of Zetta, mentioned so briefly in these written words from across the void! Yet from every line her name leaped at me, sang soundlessly in my head.

The image of her was never more clear in my memory—here in this very room where we had clasped hands and stood and swayed and wondered what Nature might be doing to us who, an instant before, had been strangers—an image of her seemed here now hovering in the shadows of the room corner behind the tense, bent figure of Dan. So clear that I almost felt something of her which had come with this letter; some unspoken longing of hers which she had sent to me as, perhaps in silence, she had watched father writing.

I think there *was* something. I felt it; and within me, my spirit was murmuring a welcome and an answer.

"Go on," said Dan gruffly. "Read it, Peter."

I shuffled the papers. "There isn't much more. He's evidently—"

"He's sent us the materials—the mechanisms out of which to build a vehicle," exclaimed Freddie. "It's evident that—"

Dan murmured. "Too late this time! Seventeen months — seventeen months more to wait—"

I laughed; an intoxication was upon me at the thought of it. "Wait, nothing! We'll be busy, don't worry about that! If we can—Freddie, what the devil?"

FREDDIE had leaped to his feet; he was standing with his head cocked, listening. There was no sound, save the vague humming from the opened cylinder stretched on the floor at our feet.

"Thought I heard something."

"You didn't," I said.

"Where?" demanded Dan. "The audiphone? It's off—dead."

"Where? Outside!" I suggested. I half rose from my seat and sank back. Freddie looked puzzled; he went to the door, listened and returned. He asked, "You don't hear anything?"

"No," I said. "Where?"

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"I don't know. Here—I mean here, right here with us. I—I guess I imagined it."

"I guess you did," said Dan. But his gaze swept the room with a tense expectancy.

My heart was pounding. We all three drew nearer together, as though for instinctive protection against something we could almost but not quite hear.

"We're nervous," said Dan. "Imagining things. It's that damned weird humming. Go on, Peter."

I resumed the letter:

You will find in this cylinder the vital element necessary to the conquering of gravity. Reet, which a bountiful nature provides here, is a very wonderful thing, Peter. With it, and with such materials available on earth which my notes herewith describe fully, I believe you will have no great difficulty in constructing your vehicle. I have sent you the basic mechanisms already fully assembled in each of their integral parts—

Freddie again interrupted me. "Where's that draft coming from? It's cold. You got some window open, Dan?"

I was conscious of cold air in the room. The door to the adjoining bedroom—the room father had once occupied, but which now was unused—stood half open. The draft of chill air seemed coming from there. And then we all three heard a bump in there; it brought us to our feet.

"Shutter banging," said Dan. "Mother must have left the window partly up—shutter banging, there's a wind starting."

We followed him into the room with a precipitous haste. It was in semi-darkness. The window was partly raised from the bottom. Cold air was sweeping in. But the shutter was fastened tightly back against the outside wall; it could not bang. Dan closed the window. We none of us made any comment. Back at the living room table I began the letter again.

There is very little I need say further, Peter. My notes, diagrams and instructions explain everything fully. Attached to several of the mechanisms, you will find individual instruction sheets.

You will need funds. I would like your enterprise conducted with the help and resources of our government behind you, if possible. You will have less difficulty in that event. But, without such aid, you will have to proceed on your own.

No doubt, Peter, by now you will have been able to possess yourself legally of my money. Perhaps you have been able to realize upon the Washington property—though this I doubt, in view of the chaotic world conditions. Use what you have freely, Peter. Take from Dan as little as possible—Heaven knows what financial stress you all must have been laboring under—

The light over my head suddenly dimmed to half its volume. Freddie gave a startled exclamation. Dan cursed.

"Something seems determined to interrupt us," I said. I held the letter up to the light. "I can read it."

"What—" Freddie began.

"Two o'clock," said Dan. "They only give us half strength light after 2 A.M. New ruling in Porto Rico for the night months."

Freddie sank back. I read:

Financial stress you all must have been laboring under. Do your best. You ought to be able to start at the next conjunction. Your start—your navigation—all that you will find in my instruction sheets. Before you arrive here, open the special sealed envelope marked "Landing instructions." Follow them implicitly.

I will meet you. I have had fairly good facilities for scientific work here, Peter. You will find my instructions accurate—all my data fully explicit. You should have no trouble. Hulda sends love. She says, love to Dan especially. Good old Dan! We feel very close to you all in spirit, Peter—in spite, or perhaps even because of the void between us. You will cross it—oh, my son, be very careful! Follow every detail of my instructions. We will be waiting, impatiently. Zetta is here, watching me as I write—

Ah, that I had divined!

Strange, dear little Zetta. So remarkable a friend—

A cry from Dan interrupted me. I had been standing awkwardly holding the letter up to the light. The room was dim, with shadows crowding close upon us. At our feet the opened cylinder lay under the half strength blue light. It was partly in shadow. At Dan's startled cry I looked down. A red radiance hovered across the cylinder in the gloom there! A faint glow of crimson! And there sounded a low guttural whine. The crimson sound! In the room here with us!

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Dan leaped. From within the cylinder one of its metal boxes was coming out! It came up with a jerk, as though raised by some invisible hand. A small, dead-white metal cube. Enveloped in a vague red glow, it came up to the level of my waist and moved away through the air.

Dan went leaping over the cylinder; struck something solid; fell prone on the floor with the metal cube clattering beside him.

There was a confusion of sounds. A sudden unearthly scream. Dan's voice shouting: "I've got it. Freddie! Oh, Peter—"

Dan was struggling on the floor with something. I could see his arms encircling it—something large. He rolled, fought. Freddie jumped for him. I dropped the letter, dashed to where both Freddie and Dan were rolling on the floor, gripping something in a glow of humming red sound.

They both shouted: "Peter, watch out! Keep away! Watch him—grab him if he slips loose—"

I was standing over them. From the red confusion a naked arm emerged for an instant. I seized it—a queerly light but solid arm of bone and flesh and muscle. But it jerked away. There was a crash as the table overturned.

"Peter! Hold him! Peter—Freddie, let go of me—don't be a fool! Let go of me, I tell you!

Something caught me in the face with a burning blow like a fire-brand. I staggered back; my flailing arms hit nothing. The room was whining with sound. On the floor Dan and Freddie in a fog of red glow, now dissipating, were shouting and struggling to disentangle themselves from each other. I heard a thump; the sound of running, padding footsteps. Before I could recover my balance from the blow in the face the sound was gone. A clatter in the adjoining bedroom, then silence.

Dan and Freddie stood erect. Panting, shaking and confused. In the bedroom, the window was again open. The intruder had gone. On the floor by the cylinder lay the white metal cube which had so nearly been stolen from us. We lifted it up. It seemed uninjured. On it was a tag, with father's inscription: "Reet catalyst concentrated—B Formula. Guard this well, Peter! Without it, your enterprise would be impossible!"

CHAPTER IX

PIONEERS INTO SPACE

JUNE 14, 1957, I set down the date with my recollection that it was for me the most momentous day of my life to that time. And I think, for Dan and Freddie also—the day upon which, after more than sixteen months of activity, we three were ready at last for the trip to Xenephrene. The events of those sixteen months were to me the mere bridging of an interval unimportant save in its consummation.

There were times when we all thought we would fail. I am not of a scientific trend of mind; nor is Dan. Upon Freddie both he and I depended for a complete understanding of father's scientific data.

Even so, there seemed to Dan and me in our impatience and futility at our own lack of scientific training a great deal about father's instructions that Freddie himself but half understood. And this Freddie admitted. We would have failed, I have no doubt, had our government disdained us. But it did not. From the first we had back of us not only government funds, but the full resources of the government's laboratories and technical staff.

The whole enterprise was conducted quietly; and though some inkling of it leaked out, the thing was kept fairly close. During most of this period—these seemingly interminable months—Dan, Freddie and I were in Miami, where in the government shops our vehicle was being built. The government laboratories were there also. In them our mechanisms were assembled; a thousand abstruse chemical and physical problems were solved.

The work progressed steadily, though with occasional maddening holdups. Father had suggested that the outer shell of the vehicle be constructed of alexite—that strange alloy, largely aluminium, after the process perfected in 1943 by the Russ, Alexia. World conditions made it difficult for some of the materials to be quickly obtained in sufficient quantity. But they were obtained, and the shell was cast almost on the date set for it in Freddie's schedule.

The daylight months of 1956, in Miami, brought heat almost intolerable. It is not my plan to describe that now. Weird

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change from what had always before been the normal! The spring twilight thaws; the brief period of lengthening days until soon the day and night were equal; then, each twenty-four hours, a longer day, a lesser night. Swiftly changing, until soon the sun never set. Blistering summer. Then again the sun touched the horizon; rose; in twenty-four hours dipped a trifle. Night a minute long! Queer cycle! But we were growing used to it already, for human life springs swiftly to adjust itself to environment.

The summer of 1956 dragged itself past. In January, 1957, with the fall twilight days passing and night again upon us, the vehicle shell was cast. Assembling of the mechanism began in February. By April, in the frigid darkness of midwinter, I think we could have been ready to start. But Xenephrene was too far away. Daily now she was overtaking the earth.

We had to await the June conjunction when at her closest point for the year, father's data told us the intervening distance would be some seventeen and a half million miles. His notes named twelve o'clock noon, June 14, as our best starting time. And in this, as in every other detail, we were determined to follow his instructions to the letter.

We had been worried all these months over father's warning concerning the presence on earth of enemies from Xenephrene. Indeed, that first evening in the Cain plantation house when the storage battery of the Reet Catalyst had so nearly been stolen from us, proved that father's fears were fully justified. The precious white metal cube was unharmed; and there was nothing else missing from the cylinder, as we had at first feared.

The intruder had left no trace of himself; but he was a man, human like ourselves, undoubtedly. Dan and Freddie had come to grips with him; I had felt his burning blow upon my face. There was a red, blistered welt there for many days. Dan and Freddie were burned about the hands and face.

Curious marks! I say burned, for perhaps that best describes it. But it was not that. A queer irritation of the skin and flesh where they had been exposed to contact with the crimson radiance. It departed within a week; and the ringing in our ears, which for a day we all feared might presage deafness, was gone in a like period. Our eyes, too, were left smarting and burning. For a day afterward I found my sight queerly blurring at intervals; and any sudden light blinded me momentarily, as one is blinded who steps abruptly from darkness into daylight. But all these unpleasant sensations passed in a few days.

This crimson radiance had been undoubtedly of a very weak intensity. It had not been used as a weapon, but merely as a cloak of invisibility, behind which the intruder had evidently felt he could steal the cylinder and escape. This we realized, though of the nature of the radiance we knew not much more than before; nor was there anything in father's data to enlighten us.

We feared a repetition of this encounter; but none was attempted. All our work was done under guard in Miami; and everywhere in the world the secret service of every government was alert. It was incredible, of course, that upon earth there would be one man of Xenephrene —and no more. We learned afterward that there were many, but at this time no trace of them was found.

IT WAS the 4th of June when at last our vehicle was completely ready—save its provisioning, some earth scientific apparatus which father had bade us bring, and our personal effects. The assembling was complete; the navigating mechanism was installed, tested and in working order.

It was then, but not until then, that success seemed assured. And with the relief of it, we all realized what a strain we had been under. By comparison, what lay ahead seemed simple. But that fancy passed; and, though we never said so, apprehension soon descended upon us again.

For myself a thousand doubts and fears assailed me. Could Freddie successfully navigate us from one whirling world to another? By mathematical formula which to me seemed incredibly abstruse, and mechanisms in our vehicle which even he only half understood? Alone, unaided, a pioneer into trackless space, with only father's complicated notes to guide him!

Freddie, during these last days, was very pale and silent. Not for anything would Dan or I have voiced our fears; but Freddie was aware of them, for they

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matched his own. Thin-lipped and solemn he sat for hours each day within the vehicle; and sometimes he would slip away from Dan and me during the hours of sleep, and we would find him there, poring over father's data, or working at seemingly endless calculations.

Spring twilight was mounting during the first two weeks of June. The spring thaws were at hand. On June 13 we made our final inspection of the vehicle to be sure its equipment was complete. It was a small affair—as small as the one in which Zetta had arrived. And similar in shape—a flattened globe twenty-one feet in vertical diameter and thirty feet across its middle width.

The thin shell of alexite gave it a dull gleaming white color. The exterior was reinforced with a thick, rolled belt of alexite like an equator around the globe's bulging middle.

There were two vertical reinforcing circular bands; passing through its poles they divided its surface into four equal segments. Into each of these segments two small bull's-eye windows were set, one directly above the other. And in one segment, near the bottom, was a small, narrow door. The top and bottom of the globe were flattened to a level area some six feet square, as though a section had been neatly sliced off, to form a small lower floor and a small roof. Each was set with a bull's-eye glass windowpane.

Such was the exterior aspect of our vehicle. I chanced to stand alone for a moment a few hours before our start, regarding it as it lay in the small stone room which had been built to house it. A tiny little world! Little white globe, so soon to be whirling through space with its three human inhabitants! And I was to be one of the three!

The globe's interior was reinforced with a lining of alexite ribs, and a brittle wire mesh cast into the alexite shell. It was tested for pressure; in the vacuum of space the outward pressure of our air content would have exploded a shell less strongly built. Father had calculated all this; his calculations proved correct; we had a wide margin of safety.

The globe inside was divided by two horizontal floorings into three compartments. The lowest one, to which the narrow doorway gave entrance, had a floor six feet square, bulging concave walls, and a ceiling some seven feet above the floor.

This compartment was our instrument room, and observatory. It had four side windows, and the lower window which comprised its floor. Between the side windows, the instruments were fitted in racks. The control table was here, and a portion of the navigating mechanism.

The middle story—much the largest of the three—contained our sleeping cots, our meager cooking arrangements, our food stock, and most of the mechanical apparatus for the navigating of the globe. The upper compartment, in size and shape like the lower, held our personal effects, our water supply, heating instruments, and the Regnalt-Dillon air purifiers, with the pumps, fans and distributors. In flight, this would always remain the upper segment of the globe; we would turn over after leaving the earth and fall toward Xenephrene.

I fear I give too much space to this pedantic description. The means to which an end is attained are always less important than the attainment itself. Certainly Dan and I, with our unscientific trend of thought, were only interested in this little globe that it might transport us safely to our destination.

THE last day came. June 14, with its raw, thawing chill in the air; its twilight at noon which almost promised a sunrise. Dan and I had not slept for twenty-four hours, in the fever of our excitement. Nor had Freddie. He had not left the globe; just sat there in the lower compartment with the control buttons on his little table and a sheaf of father's instructions, which over and over, he was studying. Once, when I bade him sleep, he turned upon me so sharply that I retreated in haste. I brought him a cup of coffee later.

"Here, Freddie." I held it out, a peace offering. He glanced up with his white face and tired eyes.

"Oh, thanks, Peter—very much."

An emotion swept me—between man and woman comes the human emotion most strongly tempestuous, undoubtedly; but there can be between a man and his friend an emotion wholly dissimilar, but of equally powerful bond. I felt it then as I laid my hand upon Freddie's shoulder.

"Thanks," he repeated. "Sorry I snapped at you, Peter."

Men are most inarticulate with each other when deeply stirred. I nodded.

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The Braun with the knife sprang at Zetta, and she called on her insect guards for help

Three hours later we left the earth. There was a pathos to our leaving, mingled with the excitement of it. Any unusual adventure in life seems to bring into play the whole gamut of human emotions.

There stood Dan's old father and mother! Not for them did Xenephrene hold any lure! They were giving their only son to what must have seemed a mad tempting of fate. They had said little.

What passed between them and Dan, I never knew. Indeed, with the preoccupation of my own thoughts, I scarcely considered it. But they came to the little stone house to see us start. They stood in a far corner of the room, apart from the few government officials who were there to speed us.

A brief, strangely dramatic scene, our leaving!

We stood there at the small doorway to our tiny world. Attendants rolled back the roof of the room; the stars gleamed down upon us. The room was dim. With my pounding heart, it seemed full of vague, moving shadows—people I must hastily bid good-by now and leave—perhaps forever.

Some one called out: "Eleven fifty-four! Better get inside, Smith."

Freddie glanced at his watch. "Yes. Well — good-by. Good-by, everybody — wish us luck." His tone was queerly stilted.

Abruptly men's hands were shaking mine; men were clapping me on the back. And then I found myself with Dan before his parents. Trembling old man

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and woman; a pity for them swept me.

"Good-by, Peter."

"Good-by," I said. Mrs. Cain kissed me. I added: "We'll be back soon. Good-by."

Freddie's voice was calling: "Hurry up, there!" I turned away. But Dan lingered. From the doorway I had a glimpse of him as with his big arms he caught his mother up to kiss her good-by, while his father clung to him. Then Dan was with us. The small heavy door swung closed and locked upon us.

Eleven fifty-nine! Freddie sat at his table, his fingers on the row of buttons. In the gloom, the only light was a glow upon the chronometer face with its second-hand making the last circle. Noon! There was a vague hum as the Reet current went on. The floor beneath my feet stirred slightly, then steadied. Through the windows I caught a glimpse of the room outside. It was silently slipping downward!

We had started!

HAD our voyage been an adventure unique in modern history, I should be constrained to describe it here in detail. But since these few stirring years which I am describing, Interplanetary voyaging has become a common thing. Father and Hulda were the first to leave the earth; Freddie, Dan and I were next. Pioneers!

We afterward gave the secret to our world; the history of Interplanetary travel will make that plain. Space-voyaging soon will no longer seem an extraordinary thing; already, the mere account of an uneventful trip is not worth the reading. But an account of Xenephrene? Ah! That is a different matter. I doubt if any world will ever be found comparable to Xenephrene.

As every one knows now, Mars is nothing like it; nor Venus; nor Mercury. They talk already of going to Jupiter; to Uranus; to Neptune. It is possible, of course. And in a few lifetimes beyond my own, they will be striving to reach the distant stars, for the spirit of adventure in man is insatiable.

Our voyage to Xenephrene was remarkable only that we were pioneers in Space-travel. To lay stress upon it here would be out of place. Those days upon earth when the climate changed were more extraordinary. And Xenephrene herself! The Wanderer unique! And those other terrible days when we returned to earth — our world harried, wounded, bleeding, all but beaten! But with spirit unbroken, fighting—

So I hasten on.

Our voyage was unmarked by any untoward incident. Our sensations at first, the novelty of it, stirred us all as we had never been stirred before. The first plunge into the dead blackness of space with the stars and the sun and all the worlds blazing like torches, is an experience never to be forgotten.

The first look backward upon a dull-red crescent earth!

Ah, the man or the woman who has had that look will feel very differently ever afterward! A humbleness of spirit; a sense of our own infinite unimportance in the great plan of the Universe! The traveler broadens; it is only the man who revolves his mind in its own humdrum little rut who thinks that he and what he stands for is the sum-total of real importance and goodness in the Universe! What differs from himself, from his own standards of thought and living, he thinks must of necessity be inferior. The traveler knows it is not so. Distant places, distant worlds, distant people—are different. Not necessarily worse. Other races have different standards, different modes of thought from our own; not better perhaps; not worse—just different. Our earth poet once wrote: "Though patriotism flatter, still shall wisdom find an equal portion dealt to all mankind." The traveler knows that it is true.

I come now to that time when in our tiny voyaging world we found ourselves, according to Freddie's calculations, at a distance of no more than two hundred and fifty thousand miles from Xenephrene. As close as our own moon is to the earth.

Our vehicle had turned over soon after starting. The earth lay in the star-field above us—a glittering red-white point, not very different from a million others! Beneath us, seen through the lower window, we were falling toward Xenephrene. It hung there amid the stars; to the naked eye now it was a tremendous, moon-like crescent. Purple-red on its lighted area. The shadowed part of its circle could be faintly seen—a dull-red shadow.

We sat in the lower compartment,

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Freddie, as usual, by his table, with Dan and me beside him. Freddie was thoroughly rested now. At the start he had worn himself to the verge of exhaustion. But once we were well away from earth he found confidence in the verified correctness of his calculations.

We were upon our course. All was going well; and to our voyage, with the novelty dulling, came that monotony which is the chief characteristic of Space-travel. There was little to do, save sleep, prepare our meals, and keep watch that no asteroid or meteor crossed our path with dangerous nearness. Freddie's calculations were, from then on, his only labor. Dan and I did the rest.

We sat now with Freddie, who had called to us. The quarter of a million mile point from Xenephrene was an objective to which we all three had looked forward with keenest interest.

"We're there," called Freddie. We came down to find him with sparkling eyes and flushed face. "Two-fifty thousand eight hundred odd miles." He shoved his papers away from him. "I brought us, didn't I? I did it!"

We clapped him on the back. We all felt as though the Rubicon were crossed. "Now," said Freddie, "we can open Professor Vanderstuyft's last instruction sheet."

Father had sent us in the cylinder one bulky envelope which expressly he had stated was not to be opened until we were within two hundred and fifty thousand miles of our destination.

He called it "Landing Instructions." He had mentioned it several times in a way almost ominously mysterious. Everything concerning Xenephrene itself father had omitted from his other notes, as though not to confuse our minds with details not then necessary. But now, we felt, as we neared the other world, the mystery that clung to it would have to be unfolded.

The prospect made our hearts pound; for there clung always to our thoughts of this other world a sense of the uncanny—we were plunging, very soon now, into something weird, gruesome perhaps. But I thought of little Zetta and I knew it would be a strange world; weird, perhaps bizzarre, but hardly gruesome.

Freddie was holding father's envelope. "Here it is—we're entitled to open it now. It's addressed to you, Peter—you read it to us."

I took the envelope, broke its seal with fingers that were trembling in spite of all my efforts to steady them.

CHAPTER X

LANDING TO FACE THE UNKNOWN

TO ONE of omniscience who could have observed us three as we sat there, it must have been a very strange scene indeed.

The tiny white globe which was our world, rotated slowly on its vertical axis, a mere white speck hanging in the black intensity of space. With its concave, encircling shell, that lower compartment, with the iron ladder leading above; the three of us sitting there at the table; Freddie alert, with keenly roving eyes, his hand out of habit resting idly beside the control buttons; Dan's great length sprawled in his low chair, his shirt open at the throat, a growth of blond stubble on his face, his hair tousled—he lounged in an attitude of ease, yet the tenseness of him was obvious; myself, sitting upright, with father's papers in my trembling hands; shadows around us; one small light casting its glow upon me; and through the window beneath our feet, the upflung glare of Xenephrene, like a tremendous crescent moon bathing us in its purple light.

The silence! There is no silence like that of Space! Upon earth we hear always a myriad tiny sounds and are unaware of them; without them, in Space, the silence seems to scream its emptiness.

Dan cleared his throat nervously. "Go ahead, Peter—what does it say?"

I rustled the papers. Father's script began with characteristic abruptness.

> "If you have done as I requested you are now within a quarter of a million miles of this world. Comparatively so close to us—oh, my son, I do hope that you are there! Soon, then, I shall see you—have you with me. I am growing old, Peter. The ties of blood seem to strengthen as we grow older. It has been lonely without you, my son, even though I have had dear Hulda—and little Zetta, of whom we grow more fond every day.
>
> "But this is no time for sentiment. I assume that Frederick and Dan are with you, I must be brief, succinct. There are several things which now I must make plain to you three. If there is anything here, Peter, which Dan and you do not understand, Frederick will make it clear.

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"Hah!" I exclaimed, "a little gibe at us, Dan!"

Freddie smiled as Dan gestured. "Go on. Let's hear it."

Good old dad! My heart warmed to him. I resumed:

"The few astronomical facts concerning Xenephrene which now you should know, are these: It is a globe flattened at the poles, expanded at the equator. Rather more so than the earth. Polar diameter, sixty-five hundred miles. Equatorial diameter seventy-eight hundred miles. Thus it is similar in size, though slightly smaller than our earth. Its average density, I believe is about that of earth. Its mass, hence, is but little less than earth. Gravitation, about the same. You will notice, in this respect, hardly any difference.

"Xenephrene's present orbit about our sun is an ellipse rather more eccentric than earth's—more comparable to that of Mercury. I believe it is not yet stabilized. There may even be a tendency toward a breaking of the ellipse at its aphelion—I sometimes shudder at the thought—if we should all be here on Xenephrene. Frederick will understand—"

I glanced at Dan. "Well, if he does, we don't."

"Never mind," said Freddie. But he did not smile.

I read on:

"Xenephrene rotates on its axis once in twenty-two hours, thirty-seven minutes, ten seconds, as we measure time on earth. This is very similar to our earth. This axis is not inclined to the plane of its orbit, but is almost exactly vertical. Hence we have here no change of seasons. And throughout the year, the periods of day and night alternate in exact and unchanging relative lengths.

"Here in the country of the Garlands, we are situated at about eight degrees south latitude. Thus, near the equator, our days are always some eleven hours and nineteen minutes long; and our night but a few seconds shorter.

"Xenephrene has one moon. Pyrena, we call it. You will already have seen it, even with your small telescope, no doubt. I will not go into the elements of its orbit now, or describe its phases as we nightly see them. A beautiful sight, Peter. It is really the sun for Xenephrene—or at least it was, before Xenephrene came to bathe in our own greater sunlight. It is a small world of incandescent gas—blazing purple. You should see our dim purple nights—strangely beautiful.

"You are now to proceed as follows:

"I attach herewith a rough map of my own, giving the general conformation of Xenephrene's surface. I drew it from my own sketches made as I came down from outer Space. It is of necessity vague, and inexact.

"These people are not explorers. They know little about their own world. And only a fraction—a very small fraction of the globe's surface seems habitable. Much of it is fluid—not water, not air—you shall see! The vast fluid areas, I have marked so on the map. And there are areas of tumbled, jagged mountains of metal—naked metal. And metal plains, smooth and barren as glass.

"The country of the Garlands I have plainly marked. As you descend, you will have no difficulty in recognizing the globe's larger fluid areas, the larger configurations—and thus in locating, as you come closer, our little land. It is very small—on earth we would call it some three hundred miles, roughly oval.

"We are only a million and a half people here—we of the Garlands. The Brauns are scarce a hundred thousand. I have marked their one city on the map, where it lies at the northern edge of our domain, with the equatorial mountains and the fluid lake of Tyre and the Tyre plain near it.

"Beware this region, Frederick! Come up from the south! I suggest now that you head for our south pole. If you have made the voyage in my calculated time, you will find Pyrena ascending from her southern swing. She rotates in retrograde, Frederick, this moon of ours—at an average distance of eighty-nine thousand miles.

"Head for the south pole, within Pyrena's orbital distance. Then come up toward the equator, between our moon and Xenephrene. If you are on time, you will find our moon at the full.

"As you descend, you will go into Xenephrene's shadow, with her between you and the sun. It is what I desire—there will be less chance then of your being seen. In the area of our night, with Pyrena shining full upon you, descend into our atmosphere. You will find it extends outward some four hundred miles. Take it very slowly, Frederick—be careful of the heat of your descent through it—judge nothing from now on by earthly standards! Remember that!

"You should be about over our ten degrees south latitude when you descend into the atmosphere. Keep between us and Pyrena—and come north to eight degrees S.

"You will be in the night, with Xenephrene rotating under you as you hover. Your altitude now should be about forty miles. If the clouds bother you, descend to keep under them. If the night is too overcast, so that from beneath the clouds Pyrena is lost to you, and the darkness is too great for you to

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see our surface readily—wait until it clears. Take no chances! Haste of that sort is too dangerous! Let Xenephrene rotate for another day and night. I will see the weather and understand.

"When the country of the Garlands comes into view, watch for my light. You will see it—a thin, steady white beam, pointing at the moon. Occasionally I shall send a red flash along its length—at alternating intervals according to the inclosed code. Thus there can be no mistake—I fear treachery—one fears everything in such times as these we are undergoing here!

"When you are convinced that it is my light you see, descend toward its source. At an altitude of ten thousand feet, cross into my beam and hold there for a time, that I may see and recognize you. I will send two swift red flashes. Leave the beam at once, and come back into it. I will know then for certain that it is you.

"Descend now, down the beam to its source. When I extinguish it, you will see my glow of lights at your landing field. Descend there, and land.

"I caution you again. Take everything very slowly! You will be seated, you three, in the lower compartment. When you land—when once you are upon solid ground—extinguish all but one very small light. Then begin to open your door.

"I say, *begin* to open it! It is to be opened very, very slowly. You, Frederick, understood, no doubt, that its queer construction was to some purpose. I was very specific about that!

"You are to undo its inner fastenings, and revolve its main circular knob, a few turns at intervals of no less than five minutes each. I want you to take fully thirty minutes to open the door.

"Let the new air of Xenephrene in slowly, that you may grow accustomed to it gradually as it comes upon you. This, of course, you have guessed as my reason for such caution. But it is not only the changed air you will be admitting! Other things will come in as well! To them also, you must become accustomed gradually.

"When the door is nearly ready to open wide, extinguish your remaining light. Sit quiet! Do not attempt to move about! Let Frederick then join you, when he has flung wide the door. Sit quiet, all three of you. Do not be afraid! There is nothing to fear! It will be strange at first.

"I will give you a minute or so to gather your composure. Then I will come in to you—oh, I pray now as I close, that this may all transpire as I have outlined! God grant that you will come safely to me at last, over such a distance! I will be waiting so anxiously for that first sight of you in my beacon beam!

"Your affectionate father."

MY VOICE trembled and broke as I ended. Emotion swept me; not only an answering love for my father which sprang to meet his dear affection as it came from the written words, but a fear as well. And an awe—what was this into which we were plunging that he should be constrained to caution us in such a fashion?

I laid down the letter. Dan did not speak; his questioning eyes were on my face. Freddie said huskily, "Well—" and stopped.

"Well," I said, "that's all."

We stared at one another. As though by consent, with a common dread we avoided discussion of what now lay before us—the landing, the opening of our door to admit this strange new world. Its air, different from that to which we were accustomed, would come in. *And other things!*

What other things?

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The three words abruptly held for me an uncanniness almost intolerable. Something not to be faced—yet we would have to face it. "Absurd!" I thought. "Why, father is there—and Hulda. And Zetta—" In truth, it was more an unreasoning dread than fear; for, as I examined it, I found that, more than anything in life, I desired now to reach Xenephrene and my loved ones; and all the vague, mysteriously uncanny things in the Universe could not have served to keep me from them.

"Hey!" said Freddie. "You seeing ghosts already, Peter?"

"Where's the map?" said Dan. "Let's look it over."

We examined it. A crude drawing upon animal skin the same as served for father's letter paper. It seemed plain enough. We discussed it, and many of the other phases of father's letter. It all seemed very explicit. We were, according to father's calculated time, exactly where in imagination his hopes would now be placing us.

If all went well—as, indeed, why should it not?—we would arrive upon one of those nights in the full of the moon during which he would expect us. As he surmised, our small telescope had long since showed us Xenephrene's moon. A tiny blazing point—purple like the planet itself. It showed now, just plunging behind its parent disk; a purple point of light, with its leaping tongues of flame even to the naked eye a quite visible corona.

Our approach to Xenephrene! I might write for hours and barely touch upon the beauty, the splendor, the wonder of it. A purple disk, a tinging with red as we neared it. Convex now—a full, round, glowing world, banked and mottled with clouds, beneath which the faint configurations of its surface-marking gradually became visible.

We headed for its south pole; rounded over it at some fifty thousand miles' distance. We saw over us, hanging to the left, the blazing purple moon. It was night, as father said, on this moonlit side of the planet. For what would have been an earth-day of twelve hours or more, we dropped downward into the shadow. The sun was hidden behind Xenephrene now; the moon blazed on us in all its purple glory.

Freddie, during these hours, was busy with constant observations and calculations; Dan and I sat enthralled with the magic of the coloring. As we slid upward toward Xenephrene's equator and gradually descended, the planet's rotation showed quite visibly under us. I could see the cone of Xenephrene's shadow as it swung off into space. It barely missed the moon; a few more of her inclined swings and doubtless she would pass into eclipse.

THE time came when all the visual heavens beneath us were encompassed by Xenephrene's bulk. There were at the moment but few clouds to hide its moonlit surface.

"Here," said Freddie, "take a look."

He had been gazing through the floor window with our telescope. I took it; gazed upon a purple area of what seemed a liquid haze; to the left, a jagged mountain range—naked crags of gleaming metal in the moonlight; to the right, and extending far up to the rim of the northern horizon, a vast glassy plain, smooth, barely wrinkled, motionless as a frozen sea congealed, while only a breath of air had been scratching its polished top. It gleamed like burnished copper in a purple light. Devoid of even a grain of sand, a twig, a blade of grass. But there was one place where, in a depression, water seemed to have gathered—an irregular crescent sea a hundred miles perhaps in length. I mentioned it to Freddie.

"Yes," he said. "I've identified it on the map. We're on the other side now from the Garland country, as your father calls it. He's in the daylight now—"

"Then to-night," Dan began.

"Yes. To-night—eleven hours from now, approximately—our landing place should be under us. We're eighteen degrees S now, I'll swing us up to ten degrees S, and we'll wait."

The full moon held level above us. As the hours passed, while we gently dropped downward, cloud areas began forming beneath us. Freddie set his jaw. "I'm going down—this is the night he'll expect us. If the clouds will break away—"

They did. We descended into Xenephrene's atmosphere. Our tiny globe grew intolerably hot; then Freddie slowed us, and we kept the cold air circulating. We went through the clouds. A dead purple mist, and then they broke above us. A rift of moonlight came through. Land

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beneath us! We could see it! A vague moonlight landscape, far down.

Freddie was at the telescope constantly; Dan and I worked the controls at his direction. Forty thousand feet, Eight South Latitude. We were hovering in the dark over a rolling country of what seemed trees perhaps—all vague and blurred and purple.

"Know where we are?" I demanded anxiously.

"Yes. Over the Garland country. The south middle of it, I should say. That Braun city he mentioned—I got a glimpse of it, Peter. Up to the north. We're all right—if only his light would show!"

Then we saw his light! A thin, motionless white beam, standing up into the clouds, where occasionally the full moon broke through a rift. His light! We were sure of it presently. A red wave of color started from its source at the ground and flashed upward. Then another, and others at intervals. We timed them; compared them to father's notations.

The time-intervals were correct. It was his light undoubtedly. His welcoming beacon!

Freddie had been keeping us cautiously away. But now at the ten thousand foot altitude he swung us into the light. Its white glare bathed us; came up through our floor window. Presently the two red flashes came. We moved away, then back again. The moment which father had awaited so anxiously had come. He knew now we had arrived safely, we had answered his signal, and holding to the light, we slid slowly down its motionless length.

I do not know how long it took. It seemed an hour, while we sat in our lower compartment, with the white glare streaming upon us. Then at last, without warning, the glare vanished.

We had extinguished our interior light; we were left abruptly in darkness.

I heard Dan's perturbed voice. "Freddie, shall I stop us?"

Freddie was on the floor, peering down. I knelt beside him. He called to Dan: "No, let us go. We're still pretty well up."

I half whispered, "Can you see anything?"

It seemed, for a moment, all quite dark. As though we were dropping into a blank, bottomless pit. Then, as our eyes grew accustomed to the absence of the glare, outlines below began to take form. The moon was gone behind a cloud. But there was enough light left to show us a dark ground, with a faint glow suffusing it, a thousand feet, not much more, below us. It seemed a solid, open, flat area, flanked with small hooded lights.

Our landing field. There was nothing else to be seen; the purple darkness crowded everything. The open space was directly under us. Freddie made sure of that. He lighted our smallest table light, and at the controls with his instruments before him, he brought us gently down.

A minute; ten minutes. None of us spoke. There was a very slight thump; our little world trembled, came to rest.

WE HAD landed! Xenephrene at last! Freddie stood up. His figure wavered slightly—perhaps because of his excitement, and the new solidity beneath his feet which made him momentarily unsteady.

"You sit still—I'll start—I'll start opening the door."

His voice held a quaver; he glanced at the chronometer, crossed the room swiftly, and took a turn or so at the door wheel. A giant shadow of him as he moved fell grotesquely misshapen upon our curved wall.

He came back to us and sat down. "Nothing to do now, but wait."

The minutes passed in silence. We did not speak; at intervals of five minutes, Freddie made his noiseless trip to the door and back. My heart seemed nearly smothering me; cold beads were dank on my forehead, neck and chest. Waiting for the Unknown to make itself seen? Heard? Felt? I wondered which; with every sense alert and straining, I sat waiting. Fear? It was that, of course. I am not ashamed of it; there is no man brave enough to front the Unknown with heartbeat undisturbed.

Nothing—as yet. Or perhaps my panting, labored breath was from the new-world air which now was coming in? The ringing in my head; the flashes of red in the dimness before my straining eyes —were they caused only by the tenseness of fear?

Freddie sat down beside me. I heard his whispered words, "Peter! It's almost open. One more turn will do it—Dan, you all right?—Peter, I'm frightened—terribly frightened!"

And Dan's gruff answer, "Yes. All right."

Our side windows were black rectan-

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gles. What was out there? For a time, thought of father had left me. He was out there; was he looking in upon us? I could see nothing; but now the thought of father steadied me. And Zetta. Was she here—near me at last?

Freddie snapped out our light with a click, thundering, echoing in the stillness. The darkness leaped upon us. Darkness and silence. But I could seem to hear my beating heart. Or Dan's. And our breathing.

And then I realized that this was no silence! Around me came thronging a million tiny noises. Jostling things of sound in the darkness. Things all alive with sound! I could hear them. Murmuring, whispering like wraiths of jabbering things alive with sound. Or was it sound I was hearing? So vague, unreal, it might have been some other sense. But it was gathering strength; jostling sounds were whirling about my ears, beating at me, gathering strength and mingling into a hum—

All in the darkness. But there was no darkness! Shapes of color — moving shapes of sound and color were here, crowding at my elbows. Formless blobs, impalpable as colored shadows; formless, yet I could imagine them into any form I chose. Jabbering, impalpable things pushing at each other as though for a better view of me! Impalpable? Suddenly one seemed to brush me; I could have sworn I felt it, light as a fairy's wing, touching my hand.

It may have touched Dan also. I heard his arm lunge; he cursed; an ash tray on the table crashed to the floor. I jumped to my feet. Panic seemed surging around us, out of which came Freddie's voice:

"Easy! Sit down, you two! I'll get the door open wide."

His padding footsteps were reassuring —something solid and real for my confused senses to grip. I could see the moving blob of him, tinged red with a faint aura that now suffused everything.

The solid hum of him, unbarring the door, was steadying; the sound of the door grating on its heavy hinges as it swung wide—

"These damned Things." Freddie came back. The poise of him! He laughed, with an odd, strained break; but still he laughed. "God! It's queer! But it's nothing. Hold steady, everyone." His laughter seemed contagious; I heard myself laughing. Was this madness stealing upon me? A chaos of the undefinable, jostling us. A wild chaos of unreality in which my confused senses seemed whirling away—

"Peter!" Ah! Reality at last! Father's anxious voice, husky with emotion! "Peter! Oh, Frederick? Dan? Are you all right?"

Solidity, reality returned; my whirling senses came back. Father was here! The solid thump of his heavy step sounded; the solid glow of the purple light he was carrying filled our room. The reality of his voice; his step; and then his arms were around my shoulders!

And Hulda's happy, welcoming laughter. I kissed her; held the reality of her dear little body in my arms; and all the red shadows and crimson whisperings of a moment before were forgotten.

Then came another voice—timorous, gentle, eagerly friendly; and a dear figure in the doorway. Zetta! Her dear, quaint voice which for all these months had been ringing in the ears of my memory, was sounding now in reality at last!

CHAPTER XI

"UNDER GARDENS"

"WELL!" said father. "Well, you did come safely, didn't you? I'm so glad, Peter. Light your light, Frederick. Well, Dan! I'm mighty glad to see you. Here's Hulda! Come here, child—here is your Dan, at last!"

Freddie snapped on our light. Even in the confusion of our joyous greetings I was aware of how strange father and Hulda looked. Father wore his hair, snow-white now, in a long, thick, shaggy mass about his ears; a smooth and glossy black animal skin was draped about him, with a white decoration on his chest; his arms and legs were bare, with skin sandals on his feet!

And Hulda! Her brown hair was shot now with pure white strands. It fell in waves upon her bare white shoulders, where her filmy robe of light-brown silken fabric was caught with gay red ribbons. The robe hung in folds nearly to her knees.

I have seen pictures of the maidens of ancient Greece. Hulda looked like that. Thongs of red crossed her breast, bound her waist and hung dangling at her knees with tasseled ends. Her legs were bare.

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Her feet in sandals like father's, but with pointed toes, the heel cut away, and thongs of red crossing her instep. Her right arm was bare; but on the left, her wrist was bound with a red ruching.

Dan had infolded her in his first hungry embrace, kissing her without thought of the rest of us, until she cried for breath. Then he held her off.

She was gasping, and laughing. "Do I —look so queer? Dan, don't you like my looks? Don't you—like me—"

"Like you?" His great arms would have wrapped her up again, but she fended him off. She was radiant; I can imagine how Dan felt; I had never seen Hulda half so beautiful. She was blushing; she laughed at him archly.

"The red, Dan." She indicated her tassels, and the ruching at her left wrist. "You see, I wear it—for you. The sign that I am spoken for, and pledged to a man."

"Wonderful, Frederick, that you all got through so safely." Father turned with Freddie, to me. "Frederick, you must meet Zetta—Peter, have you seen Zetta? There she is—come in, child."

Zetta was dressed very much as on earth I had last seen her. She stood lingering in the vehicle doorway, eager to see us, but reluctant to encroach on our family greetings. At father's words, she now shyly approached.

I stammered, "Zetta, I'm—very glad to see you again."

"How do you do, Peter." She held out her hand, and I took it. A confusion was upon me. This moment for which I had longed, came, and passed. Perhaps, as once before, the barriers of conventionality rose instinctively to hold my emotion in check.

I think it was so with Zetta, too. Our fingers barely touched; but my heart pounded harder, for I heard her murmur, "Be—careful, Peter. Be ver' careful!" A warning against the power between us! Then I met her glance as she eyed me sidewise. A roguish, impish look. This was a new Zetta—here upon her own world, her real self. Little imp, mocking my confusion with glee! She turned away, toward Freddie.

"And this is Fred'rick? I am ver' pleas' to meet so good a frien'."

I saw leaping into Freddie's eyes a swift surprise as he neared her, took her hand and shook it cordially. Freddie's nature, from mine, or from Dan's, is wholly different. Whatever surprise he felt, he gave no further sign; shook her hand heartily, grinned at her, and swung on me.

"Say, she's a little beauty, isn't she, Peter?" The old Freddie, relieved now of the responsibility of commanding our voyage, his characteristic breezy boyishness came back to him. I had not seen him in this way since the first dreadful days of the Great Change came upon us. He added, "You and I are going to be great friends, Zetta."

Her gaze on him was full of undisguised admiration. "Yes," she agreed. "I think so, too."

We were ready to start. "Leave everything," said father. "I'll have it guarded, and we're not going far."

He took his lantern; shook it. It seemed to be a translucent animal-bladder, possibly, filled with small objects that rattled. The light from it was a glow of phosphorescence. He held it aloft.

"This light is bad. Zetta, fix this up, will you? Can't they do better than this?"

Strange thoughts to spring to my mind! As Zetta took the lantern, held it near her face, I fancied that she murmured to it. And as though in answer to her command, the purple light grew stronger! I fancied so.

"Thanks," said father. "Give it to me. I'll lead the way. Put out your light, Frederick. You lads took your landing very well. Strange and disturbing—this unreality just beyond our reach—isn't it, Peter? You'll grow used to it—you'll forget it."

He started away, with the rest of us following in the shadows behind his upheld lantern. At his words, the crimson murmuring things in the darkness again began crowding me. But I was not afraid of them now.

On earth, always there are a million tiny sounds, audible if we will but listen, and things constantly to be seen which, through habit, we look at but cease to see. This was like that. With attention upon it, this unreal sub-world of Xenephrene was strange and fearsome. But it never obtruded; and already, as father said, I found myself ignoring it.

There was, indeed, so much of strange reality spread now before me! We stepped from our small doorway, upon the solid ground of Xenephrene. The moon was beneath a heavy cloud. The landing

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lights were extinguished; darkness enveloped us. It seemed a haze; the swinging purple rays of father's lantern showed it as a swaying mist in the air.

The night was warm, almost steamingly oppressive. But this feeling, too, soon passed, and I found it wholly comfortable. The lantern, I learned later, was what I had thought—filled with phosphorescent insects, like fireflies; and Zetta had commanded them to shine more brightly!

Father led us slowly. The ground was level beneath my feet—a corrugated, metallic surface. Sometimes there seemed a soil, and in the darkness, the deeper shadows of giant vegetation. Great leaves arched up over us, and soon we were under them, walking now on a soft, moldy turf. A heavy, earthy scent rose from it; the damp smell of molding vegetation. In the air, too, there seemed the scent of distant blossoms. A fragrance. It lay in strata, seemingly; for occasionally it was heavy, exotic.

A MOVING shadow came up to us—a white-skinned man, darkened by the purple glow of father's light.

"Oh, Kean?"

"Yes, Professor." He spoke our language!

"We're going down. They came safely. Have the guard placed as I directed.

"Yes, Master."

"Not Master—Professor. You had it right the first time."

"Yes—Professor."

"Come to me after sunrise, Kean. I'll have plenty to say then."

A man gestured. "They are checking too many of them in. A hundred or two more came to-night."

"Oh!" exclaimed Hulda.

Zetta said quickly. "That woman, Brea—I saw her to-day—"

This fellow Kean seemed a young man, my own age or less. His face was serious. "Yes, I saw her. They checked her in—for how long it is they would let her stay I do not know. Too many Brauns are here now. They come, but there seems no record of their going—"

"Place the guard," said father. "And after sunrise I'll see you, Kean."

Zetta said abruptly: "Kean, will you seek out Graff? I wish to see him—"

"No!" father protested.

"Yes," she said quietly. A clinging, soft little vine I had thought her, but obviously it was not so. Kean met father's glance. Evidently he also did not approve of Zetta's wish.

"I may not see him," he returned evasively. Before Zetta could speak again, he vanished silently into the shadows. I fancied he made a leap upward; I did not see him come down. We started off.

We were descending now down a gentle slope. The verdure grew thicker as we advanced. The perfume in the air turned aromatic, as though scented by a million spiced blossoms. Abruptly the moon came out for a moment, a small purple sun. The darkness lifted. We were in a jungle of vegetation. It arched over us—great leafy spires, interlocking to a network through which the moonlight straggled.

There seemed few trees; it was all a network of stalks, and giant vines and great huge lacy leaves. Pods and flowers hung in clusters. Over our heads the foliage was solidly interwoven. I gazed up, and in the open moonlight up there, it seemed to me on top of this tangled vegetation, an artificial roadway—a street perhaps—was resting. There were moving shapes up there, as though people might be passing along a city street.

"Here we are," father called back over his shoulder. He shook his lantern vigorously, and raised it over his head. "Here we are, *'Under Gardens,'* Hulda named it. Our home—yours too now, while we are here." He chuckled. "You might almost think you were back on earth, mightn't you?"

He had stopped to let us come up with him. We had been following a narrow, winding path, which like a tunnel, had been cut downward into the jungle. It opened now unexpectedly into a small clearing. Not that, rather should I call it a cave. The vegetation had obviously been hewn away to form a circular opening—a cleared ground space in an oval of a few hundred feet, walled in by the jungle, with the heavy network closing overhead fifty feet or more above us.

The moonlight straggled down, to mingle its purple light with father's purple lantern. I saw here in this cave-like space, a little house built in earth fashion, a solidly square, two-storied structure of metallic blocks. Its walls gleamed smooth and burnished. Its windows had shutters sticking out at an angle. Behind one of the windows a dull interior light showed.

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"Zetta does not want to hear your kind of talk, Graff!"

There was a front veranda, with a railed balcony over it. Flowers were massed upon a flat roof. A few of their stalks had climbed and mingled with the vegetation arching above the house. On the ground there was a front garden with a metallic fence. Flowers growing; and low things in the ground which might have been vegetables.

Altogether, it was a friendly-looking little dwelling place, neat, orderly, and for all its fantastic surroundings, of wholly earthly aspect. It was, I think, just for that reason, as surprising a sight as anything Xenephrene ever showed me.

FATHER was laughing at our amazement. "The government built it for me. They were very kind—built it exactly as Hulda and I directed. They think it is the most bizarre affair in their world—as no doubt it is. Zetta lives here with us but she hates it. You do, don't you, Zetta?"

"No," she said. Her gaze at him was affectionate, and again I saw that roguish, sidewise glance. A little witch, fascinating. "Oh, no," she added. "I grow used to it now. But at first it was ver' terrible."

We were at the garden gate, which father had flung wide.

"Come in," said Hulda. "Dan, when you see how father has fixed it up—the trouble everybody went to, trying to make things look like earth. Oh, if we could only welcome you all at a time less critical—frightening. Xenephrene is really very beautiful around here, Dan—"

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We mounted the metallic veranda and entered the living room. It held a soft illumination of yellow-white light. Grass matting on the floor. A polished wooden table—wood queerly porous; on the table a fabric doily; a lamp of skin like the lantern father was carrying; and his writing materials.

Furniture about the room, chairs of wood, with cane seats. A metallic bowl, with water and flowers. Cushions on some of the chairs. On the floor, a huge cushion bound circular with a fabric rope; I surmised it to be a seat for Zetta. On a chair near an inner doorway lay a feminine garment which Hulda snatched away.

Father gazed around him proudly. "Not bad, is it? Come on. I'll show you the rest of the place, and then put you to bed. You must, all of you, be exhausted—"

"I'm not tired," Freddie declared. And added, like a child: "I don't want to go to bed."

"Well, you're going," said father. "I'll give you till dawn."

Dan demanded, "How long is that?"

"Five or six hours. It will be dark when I wake you up." His arm went around my shoulders affectionately. "It's good to have you with us, Peter. There is a great deal I have to say—but more which we'll have to do." His voice turned very solemn. "Things have reached a crisis here. It has come—more quickly than I thought."

Zetta said: "My people have made a mistake—if now they will listen to you—"

"They'll listen to me tomorrow," he said grimly. "If it isn't too late. We mustn't get into any discussion now—get these poor travelers to sleep."

It did not seem to me that Freddie or Dan or myself could possibly sleep, with all these new, strange things whirling in our heads. But we certainly did. In an upper bedroom, upon beds which might have been on earth, with bedroom windows open wide to the scented night, I closed my eyes and in a moment drifted off. In the silence and darkness, the crimson unreal things lurked around me. But they now seemed friendly visions; my closed eyes shut them out; my ears heard their faint murmurs, but they lulled me.

The last thing I remember was thinking of how we had said good night to Zetta and she had left us. On Xenephrene, gravity was almost the same as earth; in walking, I had noticed no difference. Zetta said good night to us at the doorway of one of the upper rooms. She turned and went through the doorway with a graceful leap.

I think she knew it would startle us—I think she did it just for that reason. It carried her past the head of the stairs; she touched the balustrade lightly with a hand for balance as she went over it, and dropped the fifteen feet to the floor below. A fairy's leap, Dan had called it that in the moonlight of a Porto Rican night. But it seemed even more fantastic in these conventional interior surroundings of the house, the halls and the stairway. I drifted off to sleep, thinking of it.

CHAPTER XII

AT DAWN

"WE HAVE an hour," said father. "There is a great deal I must tell you, but we must make it brief."

"Kean will be coming at sunrise," Hulda said. "I'd have got you up earlier."

"I slept like a watchman," said Dan jovially. "Your air here must have a drug in it—Hulda, what's the matter with your hair?"

"The matter? Don't you like it?"

"Well, but—it's turning gray. I mean—white!"

Father said: "Look at mine—wholly white. There's something in the air here—it kills the pigment coloring. There's no one in this world with hair other than white."

With father and Hulda, we were seated on the roof of Under Gardens. I had, I thought, been asleep only a moment when father came to awaken us. "Hulda is getting breakfast. Get up, you three." He added when we were fully awake, "You'll find you don't need as much sleep here as on earth."

Hulda served us breakfast in a quaint simulation of the way she would have done it on earth. I would not pretend to describe the food. I was reminded of Dan's describing the involuntary grimaces Zetta had made at the food they served her in Porto Rico.

There was a beverage which might have been either tea or coffee—a sweetish mixture of some herb; and the cooked flesh of what I hoped was an animal—and eggs. They were small, and queerly

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oblong in shape; I did not think it best to inquire into them too fully.

"It's a very nice breakfast, Hulda," I said lamely, as we were finishing.

"You'll get used to it," said father. "Come upstairs."

It was dim on the roof top; the full moon was evidently low to its setting horizon; shafts of its purple light slanted down through the thick arch of vegetation. The flat roof of the house had a low metal parapet; paths between gleaming basins of flowers; and a small open area with comfortable chairs. We seated ourselves and father produced what were evidently home-made cigars. But they were not bad.

"Well," said Dan, "this is mighty luxurious." In the moonlight I could see his great lazy length stretched in his chair. "Hulda, sit here by me."

She sat beside him, with her hand on his. Dear little Hulda; she would make any man happy to whom she gave the true steadfastness of her love. Freddie was alert and eager to hear all that father had to tell us. So was I, but my mind was divided by thoughts of Zetta. She had not yet appeared; and no one had spoken of her.

Father gazed around us. "It's been comfortable here. It must seem very strange to you."

Within the vault of this encompassing wall and ceiling of vegetation, the air hung heavy upon us. I had been convinced that a street was overhead; if so, it was untraveled now—in the moonlight up there I could not see the moving figures.

There seemed nothing living in sight. A moment later I was not so sure. Vines ran up like ladders from the rooftop of the house to the jungle ceiling. I thought, far up there, a figure was clinging. A brown shape; a man—an animal? Or was it some giant brown insect lying motionless on a great stalk of the vines? And then, down on the ground in front of the house by the front fence, I saw unmistakably a brown crawling thing. The length of a man—crawling prone with several legs; it raised an eye toward our roof—a spot of dull red light with a circle of smaller lights around it.

I stared; it came crawling to the gate; raised itself up, standing the height of a man upon a tripod of jointed legs; then sank back and crawled slowly on, following the line of fence.

Father remarked my awed, half-frightened gaze. He laughed. "One of our guards. We've half a hundred of them on the ground here, and in the foliage. We're just a little alarmed over Zetta's safety—you'll understand presently."

I took advantage of that. "Where is Zetta?"

"Sleeping," said Hulda. "They do not sleep very regularly, here on Xenephrene. She'll be up presently—I didn't want to awaken her."

FATHER settled himself in his chair. "Before I can make you understand conditions here, I'll have to give you an idea of the history of this world—this race of humans so unlike ourselves physically, yet in their human qualities so very similar. Don't be impatient, Frederick. I know what you want are the cold scientific facts—I'll be as brief as I can.

"They have always called Xenephrene 'the Wanderer.' It was their name for their world. Our ancient earth astronomers in their ignorance termed our planets of the Solar System 'wanderers.' They are not. They are chained to our sun. Xenephrene has always been free. Wandering free among the stars. Thus you will understand that the astronomical conditions we have here now are all new to Xenephrene. What they were before is immaterial. Nights of wan starlight; purple days of Pyrena's moonlight.

"Perhaps in the remote past most of Xenephrene's surface was habitable. That is not known. Very little of it is habitable now, and there is only one main race—these Garlands. Only this one habitable region; they call it and the city here 'Garla.' The land very possibly is shrinking slowly to a lesser area; the race certainly is dying. Ten thousand years from now—" He shrugged. "What difference what the outcome may be then? Ten thousand years ago the Garlands were evidently a very progressive, 'modern' people. Their records show it."

Father gazed at us earnestly. "I want you to understand this; it explains much. On earth we are climbing now from savagery to what we might call civilized modernity. The achievements of science—modern life—a growing complexity of existence—all that, to us on earth, has come to stand for advancement.

"These Garlands passed that era of their development centuries ago. Their

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history, their records, their traditions speak eloquently of a past age when they lived in a machine-made world of science—the sort of world we are building so rapidly on earth. There is, not far from here, the ruined shell of one of their great cities. I fancy that in its prime our present-day New York or London would have seemed very primitive indeed. It is abandoned; in moldering ruins now.

"There came a time when, growing decadent, or perhaps with a greater wisdom, the Garlands began to feel that they were in error. Leaders rose among them to preach a new philosophy of life.

"You understand, I am speaking of changes that came, not quickly, but spread over centuries. These people—a single race they were then—were isolated upon their wandering world. Their science made them understand it more thoroughly than we understand our earth. They had built for themselves a complex civilization. They lived in bustling metal cities. Machines did their work.

"But they found, strangely enough, that the more 'labor-saving' devices they invented, the more work there was to do. The cities were racked with disease. A hundred million people, crowded upon too small an area, living a complex artificial life, began to die faster than they were being born. There was little happiness; life was too complex; the rush to keep up with it was too great a strain."

Father was smiling with a faintly ironical twist, but his voice was very earnest. "It is queer that one must come to another world to have a revealing mirror held up to one's self! They found out, their Garlands, that they were on the wrong track! It may have taken them centuries to become convinced of it—but when they decided they evidently did it very suddenly. In a lifetime or so.

"Their wonderful modern cities began to decay. The machines which they had built to do their work began to stand idle—and instead of there being more work to do, it seemed that there was less! They began to remove complexities of life; the restless urge to 'advance' into some vague golden age of achievement, died out. They realized that happiness in life did not lie that way; they saw in Pyrena's purple moonlight a greater beauty than all their man-made splendor had ever given.

"THEY fell—if you want to call it that—back to simplicity. With the greater knowledge of what they had passed through, with the stress of 'modernity' no longer harrassing them, a new altruism came. A primitive race climbing upward is in no sense comparable. The savage has no knowledge; his simple life is for him one of struggle; the survival of the fittest is the only law he knows. Up to so-called civilization the survival of the fittest governs everything; the Garlands, at their complex, scientific pinnacle of civilized life, were inherently as barbarous as at their savage beginning.

"But once they began to revert—ah, then it was very different! They had the knowledge of how to wrest from nature a comfortable existence. As their wants grew fewer, humans looked at each other, not like mistrustful predatory animals, but with a new kindliness.

"That is the present condition. The Garlands live now only for happiness. Their life, their government, their whole mode of thought and living, is designed upon a basis of as little struggle for existence as possible. They live for one thing only; to enjoy their world, not as they might mold and change it, but as the Creator made it, and gave it to them.

"It is a benign world. Not to my mind, of course, as benign or desirable as our own. But once they began to enjoy it, the Garlands found it very blessed. There are fires within Xenephrene which, for all her wanderings, seem to keep the surface temperature at a pleasant warmth. Food grows readily; rains are frequent. There is, fundamentally, no tendency toward human disease.

"The few wants that the Garlands now realize they need for happiness and health are easily supplied. No one works very much; there is plenty of time for pleasure. The struggle for a high civilization was perhaps necessary. It gave an experience of what to accept and what to reject; and a knowledge of how to control the forces of nature. I'll explain that more fully later.

"There is evil in nature here—a danger which on earth we have not. The Garlands have preserved enough of their science to enable them to control it. Enough science also to guard against any attack. They're not fatuous! There is a scientific body—they call it by a word I translate as Guild. A small body

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of scientists who are 'modern' in every respect. Their work is secret—so that what they do may not contaminate the people with any desire again to 'achieve.' They are thoroughly trustworthy, these scientists—"

Hulda said suddenly: "Or at least you hope so."

"Yes," he said gravely. "I hope and believe so. They hold in their hands the power of this world. In their grottos they have weapons ready and waiting—and controlled power which holds in check the evil forces of nature—the great subworld of Xenephrene which lies here within the cognizance of our human senses, as you knew when you landed and first opened your door to let it in."

I exclaimed: "These crimson things—this sound!"

It was around us, murmuring in our ears as we sat there.

"Yes," he agreed. "It is harmless, if controlled."

It was what his look implied, what he refrained from saying, that brought me a shudder. He changed the subject abruptly.

"The animal and insect world is very interesting here, Peter. It is not comparable to what we have on earth at all. You'll understand that very shortly. There are few animals. The insects—" His glance involuntarily went above us; that great brown thing was lying motionless up there in the foliage. "The insect world plays a very large part in the scheme of things here. These Garlands have a very well ordered world. All designed for a pleasant existence. All this that the Guild of Science does is never obtruded in the Garland's happy life. There is no stress—no struggle—"

Freddie interrupted: "I'm hanged if I understand you, Professor Vanderstuyft. You talk as though this were some Elysium here. Utopia—something like that. But you sent for us because of impending danger. Last night when we arrived Hulda talked very differently.

"Even awhile ago—and look at Hulda now—"

Hulda's face certainly was very solemn; Dan put his arm around her. I said: "I feel the same—what Freddie says—father, if there is no stress, no struggle here—"

He gestured. "I meant, in fundamentals. This is no Utopia. There never has been any Utopia in human existence, and there never will be. Human nature, wherever you find it in the immensity of God's Great Universe, will have its human failings. If it had not, it would not be human. There are good people—and bad people. Most of us are a blend of both qualities. There is nothing wholly good short of Divinity, and nothing wholly bad save our conception, perchance, of Satan."

"Your father is in a philosophical mood," Dan commented to Hulda.

But she did not smile. Father said: "Perhaps. But in reality I'm trying to make clear to you the causes which have brought forth here a serious condition. It affects this world—and you, all of us—for you are now plunged into it with me. And the safety of our own earth—" Father's voice turned vigorous. "Why do you suppose I sent for you? I could not leave here—I would rather, infinitely rather, have come back with Hulda."

"Tell us," said Dan.

FREDDIE prompted: "There are two races here. You mentioned the Brauns in your letter. Are they the race which menaces the earth? Who invaded it before?"

Dan said: "That night in our house in Porto Rico—who took you away? What was Zetta doing there? Who was the man with her we found dead? She had just told you everything that afternoon you both disappeared—what was it she told you—"

"You see, there is so much, father, which we are eager to know—" I put in. He raised his hand against our outpouring of questions.

"I'm trying to tell you as best I can. There was only one race here—the Garlands. They were not all of one mind in giving up modernity. No race of people can ever be all the same. Some continued to lust for achievement; some desired personal power—conventional riches; some were just plain bad. Criminals. Only in Utopia would there be a complete lack of crime.

"Out of this diversity the Garland rulers strove to weed the discordant element. Generations ago it was found expedient to exile criminals. A region north of here, at the edge of the metal plains, was set aside as a penal colony. Criminals were banished to live there, and there they bred their kind.

"Then, later, it was made by law a

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crime here in Garla to preach modernity. The element—outside of the legalized scientific Guild—who still lusted for the old achievement, were classed as criminals and were banished also. As a matter of actuality they were largely criminals at heart.

"There were a few well-meaning crusaders who felt that the world was going wrong—who actually believed their doctrine of 'hustle, bustle and get rich.' But for the most part this element was composed of men of criminal instinct who thought they could gain power by such a stand. They preached, sought followers, tried by every means to foster a discontent. Some were clever, learned men; one even tried to foment a revolution and seize the government; another started a little city and culture of his own.

"Gradually they were weeded out and exiled. Thus, to the north of here, the race of the Brauns was created. Of criminal stock, primarily—and constantly absorbing all the criminals from Garla. They have one large city—nearly all of them live in it. They are progressive—modern, as I term it. Fundamentally, of course, they are not intellectually the equals of the Garlands. But they think they are. They number now about a hundred thousand. Somewhat more than that, perhaps. They have their own government; they punish and imprison their criminals according to their own standards of justice."

"I should think," said Dan, "that they would object to having the Garlands dump criminals upon them."

"If they do, they have no other recourse. They could, naturally, banish them to some other region. But they do not. The Brauns are few in number. They welcome new citizens. Their city is very progressive. Their chief occupation is industry. They have commercial intercourse with Garla; they bring us clothing, implements, various manufactured articles, which we exchange for food. They do not go in for agriculture—indeed they have very little, and very poor land.

"The Garlands, you understand, are the ruling race. They are ten or fifteen times more numerous than the Brauns. And for all their voluntary, rustic simplicity, they are far more intelligent. The Brauns are not allowed here, except when they are checked in through our frontier guards. They are given a permit, if their desired visit seems justifiable; they are allowed to stay only a limited time to transact their business, and then are checked out.

"Their government now, for all their civilized talk of democracy and freedom, is an autocracy, almost a despotism. It is controlled by one Graff, a giant of a fellow who calls himself a scientist. As a young man here in Garla, he tried to gather followers about him, and to seize our government. He was exiled. Among the Brauns, he rose rapidly into a very solid power. He is a genius in his way, no doubt. Certainly he has a genius for organization. A magnificent physique—he is larger than you, Dan—and possibly stronger. They tell me, too, he is a great orator. He can sway people—he talked himself where he is, as did many a man in our own earthly history.

"A few years ago—just before Xenephrene wandered into our solar system to be entrapped by our sun—Graff had stirred his people into thinking they could conquer the Garlands and thus rule Xenephrene. The most progressive, most civilized race—why could they not overcome these fatuous peasants? The Braun civilization, as you can imagine, has developed all the extremes of riches and poverty. They have factory workers who are miserably downtrodden. Graff, largely responsible now for it all, yet poses as a patriot and a hero. His ignorant class follows him, hoping blindly to better itself.

"Graff came here with a sudden coup to war against the Garlands. With all his diabolical science—by every inhuman means he could employ. And he was very much surprised to be abruptly repulsed. The Garland Scientific Guild was ready; the Brauns were horribly slaughtered; chastened, and things went on as before."

I HAD been aware for some time that the scene around us was brightening. The moon evidently had set, or nearly so. A luminous quality of yellow color seemed in the air; the purple haze was going. Dawn was at hand. Our first day upon Xenephrene! What would it bring forth? My breath came faster at the thought.

The vault of foliage around and over us was taking clearer form; new colors were coming to it. Down on the ground the crawling thing was coming back past

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our gate. It met another of its kind. They rose up, stood for a moment together, and then parted, crawling their separate ways. Had they spoken to each other as they passed? They had seemed, to my quickened, stimulated fancy, almost like two shapes of men, guards, exchanging a low word as they passed on their night patrol. I shuddered. Men! That crawling thing down there in the shadow by the burnished metal fence might have been a giant ant; certainly nothing human.

Father leaned forward toward us; his earnest gaze held my wandering attention. "I come now to the more recent events which directly concern us of the earth. Xenephrene wandered in to join our little family of planets gathered about our sun. Graff, with his science, in which astronomy evidently is further progressed than ours of earth, was well aware of what had happened. His telescope showed him earth—showed him very possibly things on earth which gave him a new lust for conquest. Here was a great, fair world, ready to his hand for the taking. He could never be master of Xenephrene—of that he was convinced.

"He gathered a small force and went to earth. His intention then was not to try to conquer it—the trip was merely experimental. He wanted to make sure of conditions there—"

"To know what he was up against," I put in.

"Exactly, Peter. He is a clever, resourceful fellow. He landed, as we know, near New York. Then went South, to investigate the warmer climate—the snow and cold were disconcerting to him.

"To give you an idea how carefully he plans things—he speaks now both our English and Spanish, making ready for his future earth campaigns when he may need them. He captured—this he told me very blandly—an earth man near New York. Learned English from him. And also captured a Venezuelan—who supplied the Spanish. Both captives, as Graff blandly says, unfortunately died when he was through with them. It was not a great task for him to learn our tongues. The Xenephrene mind absorbs new things—learns—more readily than ours. And Graff is perhaps even exceptional in that."

"Zetta—" I began.

"Zetta and her father were here in Garla. The news that Graff had invaded earth aroused great interest here. The Garlands doubtless might have stopped him if they had known of it sooner. But they did not. Also, the government here decided that they would not interfere—it was really nothing to them."

"I'd think," said Freddie, "they'd have been pleased to get rid of him and his tribe."

"That was the general idea. Indeed, perhaps it still is. That's what I'm working against. Zetta's father—alone of all the Garland government at that time Graff made his first invasion of earth—was anxious to stop him. Zetta's father preached the doctrine, 'Do as you would be done by.' He wanted to protect the earth people, or, if not that, at least to warn them.

"Zetta, of course, felt the same. Her mother is dead—she and her father, without other near kin, were very close and dear to each other. They got nowhere in trying to persuade the Garlands to help our earth. Zetta, had she found the opportunity, might even have tried to join Graff's expedition, a wild, girlish idea—she felt she might have some influence with him—get him to give up his scheme of conquest—"

"In Heaven's name, why?" Dan demanded. "Why did she think she might influence him?"

"Because he is in love with her," father replied gravely.

"In love—" I exclaimed.

"Yes. He has pleaded for her many times. He never comes here that he does not try to get her to return to the Braun city with him. He's very gentle with her—she seems not to fear him."

"Well, I would," said Hulda; and father nodded. And added: "An unscrupulous scoundrel, beyond question. I have felt for months that Zetta was not safe from him. Whenever he is in Garla, I keep our place here well guarded."

"He's in Garla now?" I asked. My heart was beating fast. "Didn't Zetta tell that man last night that she wanted to see this Graff?"

"Yes. But I will not let her. She thinks she might be able to stop him going to earth. A foolish girl's idea." Father waved it away.

"I learned very recently, though we have suspected and feared it for some time—Graff's real expedition to attack earth is now ready! Do you understand me? He's going to earth with all his force

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to make his real play to conquer it—not seventeen months hence—but now! Graff is ready now to attack the earth. Oh, Peter, if I had only known!"

That miserable phrase again! That accursed phrase!

"Peter, I should have sent for you sooner. I could have used every effort—sent for you seventeen months ago. Well, it's too late now to think of that. In a few days! Unless we can stop him! Or persuade the Garlands to do something about it—"

"Which they won't," said Hulda. "He's here in Garla buying food for his expedition. And making public speeches to our people—promising them heaven knows what kind of rewards when he returns from conquering the earth. The Garland public is half won to him now. And the woman Brea is here—"

"WHO is Brea?" I asked.

"A woman who wants to join him," said father. "Call it marriage—I haven't time now to go into the social laws of this world."

"You were telling us how Zetta went to the earth," Freddie prompted. "Was that her father who went with her?"

"Yes. They could get no help from the Garlands, so they started alone—to warn us on earth—to do what they could to help us. Zetta's father was ill. The trip was bad for him. He died, just as they arrived. And Zetta carried on his plans."

Freddie persisted: "The Garlands gave them the vehicle?"

"Yes."

"What weapons have they available here? Now, I mean. Suppose they gave us some—"

Father smiled somewhat ruefully. "The Scientific Guild here takes me only partially in its confidence. Smiling, polite, courteous—but I am a stranger—they never forget that for a moment. What weapons they have, I confess I don't know. Graff's method of attack on earth—that, too, I don't know. His weapon, which we called the 'Crimson Sound'—I can only guess its real nature. It is allied with the Infra-Red world—that is obvious.

"At all events, when I learned that Graff was planning to attack our world again, I demanded of the Garlands a vehicle with which to go to earth. They told me they had none. We're building one—it may be ready now. As a matter of fact, I did not feel it best to leave here. I still may be able to persuade them to help us. They were willing to have you come. They provided me with the cylinders—and the mechanisms—so readily that I was forced to suspect that in reality they have everything on hand which we would need. Zetta has done everything she can do. But she is only a girl—the government pays little attention to her. She has made several speeches to the women of Garla—but they availed nothing."

Father's fists were clenched on the arms of his chair. "When I sent for you three, I thought we would have seventeen months. I thought with your presence—your words and pleadings to add to mine—to make them help us, and—I'll confess it—I was lonely for you. I'm getting old."

"You thought something else, father," said Hulda quietly. Strange little Hulda! A will of iron, beneath her soft, dovelike little body!

Father lowered his voice slightly; his glance around us in the growing twilight of dawn had a surreptitious aspect. "Yes, I did. I thought that with your youth and strength and daring we might perhaps be able to thwart Graff here on Xenephrene before he started. Or, failing that"—his voice fell lower—"we might even dare try and make away with the Garlands' weapons—get them to earth."

Dan leaped to his feet; his height towered over us. "Well, it's not too late for that, is it? See here, why can't we—"

"Sit down," said Freddie. "There's a lot we don't know about this thing yet. Professor Vanderstuyft, how did you and Hulda and Zetta happen to disappear that night in Porto Rico?"

"Graff knew Zetta was on earth," said father. "He came to get her—I was up, and Hulda was awake. The man Graff sent captured all three of us. We went back in the vehicle Zetta had arrived in. Our captor's name was Kean—that same young fellow who spoke to us last night—he's coming here shortly now to see me."

"Then he was a spy—not really one of Graff's men?" Freddie suggested.

"No. He was in Graff's service. But a very decent fellow. He had been convicted of a crime here in Garla. A theft. Convicted unjustly, he says, for he still maintains his innocence. They're trying him again now—at his request—even

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though he has recently been pardoned and reinstated in Garla. He was exiled, and, in his resentment, he joined Graff. He captured us in the Cain plantation house. He was supposed to take us to the Brauns. But he didn't. He brought us here."

"Why?" asked Dan.

Father was smiling at Hulda. "Well, Dan, I think you'd better ask Hulda that. But don't be angry with her. She is—"

A woman's scream brought us all to our feet. My blood chilled; a wave of ice seemed sweeping up to grip my heart. A scream from within the house below us! A scream of terror! Zetta!

CHAPTER XIII

"EMPEROR OF THE EARTH!"

IN THE flat light of dawn we must have looked ashen as we stood there on the roof top with Zetta's scream ringing in our horrified ears. I remember standing transfixed just an instant. Father made a leap toward the stairway that led down into the house, but a cry from Hulda checked him.

"Look! The guards—look there!"

We were at a corner of the roof where it projected and gave a side view of the building. In the twilight I could see the ground—a garden path between flowering shrubs; the burnished side wall of the house; the lower windows, with shutters slanting out; and an upper window, diagonally beneath us, Zetta's room! It seemed so. It was opened; another scream from Zetta came through it.

I recall that my confusion was mingled with a sense of relief—this cry seemed to hold not so much terror as anger and words of command.

It all happened in no more than an instant, while we hung over the roof parapet, watching. From the ground a figure leaped upward—a great brown thing with spindly legs, shining shell of jointed body and a head with thin waving arms beside it.

From within the room a commotion now sounded, a struggle—the scratching of giant insect legs, the pad of human feet. The thing on the ground outside came sailing up with its leap; it clutched the casement, went scuttling in the window.

Father left us and ran down the staircase from the roof, but we did not heed his going. Then from the window a man's body was tumbled out. The grotesque forms of two great insects showed there; they were in the room, pushing the man through the window. He fell lightly to the ground; lay huddled, writhing in a heap. From the window they leaped down after him. A thing with brown spreading wings came sailing down from the foliage; a dozen others were leaping from unseen places.

Zetta appeared at the window. Zetta, unharmed. She gazed down but behind her, father appeared and drew her back into the room. On the ground a score of the insect guards were writhing, scratching, pawing over the body of Zetta's assailant. One scuttled away with a fragment, and two others chased it.

"It's perfectly clear to me," said father. "Kean, this blackguard Graff tried to abduct Zetta. What will your government say to that, when I tell them this morning? Are we to have these Brauns committing crimes right here in Garla?"

We were all in father's living room, half an hour after the attack on Zetta. Kean had come; he stood now before us respectfully listening to father's indignant words. He was a slim young fellow, as short as Freddie and as slender; a smooth, white-skinned youth, in leather, sleeveless jacket and short, wide-flaring leather trousers. Bareheaded, his thick, white hair hung long to his ears, with a thong binding it about his forehead. His face was pleasant, with a delicacy of cast suggesting girlishness, but his mouth was wide and firm-lipped, his chin strong and thoroughly masculine.

I liked him at once, this Kean. He smiled at us and shook our hands. He spoke English, like Zetta, with that quaint, clipped accent.

Zetta had not been hurt. She had been awakened by an intruder at her window. An insect guard evidently had followed him in, had attacked him. The rest we witnessed.

"Who was he?" Kean demanded.

She shook her head. "I do not know."

Father said: "You never saw him before?"

"No, never. I think not."

"A Braun?"

"Oh, yes."

Kean gestured. "If we had him, we could tell—"

"He is—gone now," said Zetta. I shud-

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dered at the memory. Gone indeed!

Father repeated: "Graff evidently sent him to abduct her. Is the government going to do nothing—"

"They would want proof," said Kean quietly. "I was thinking—Zetta, was he trying to get you away, or—"

"Or what?" Hulda demanded.

"Or kill her. I was thinking—it might not be Graff who sent him." He waved away his words. "It would be a very serious problem—other days. But not now—there is too much else."

It struck me that Zetta's face bore a queer expression. She said suddenly: "I will tell you the truth."

We turned on her; she was smiling a faint, quizzical smile. "I was sleeping, as I said. The insect guards caught a man who leaped for my window. A Braun—I had never seen him before. They would have torn him—but I made them stop. I tell them, bring him in. And when they did, I sen' them, the guards, outside, for I wish to speak to him alone."

Hulda exclaimed: "Zetta, you did not!"

"I did," she returned calmly. "The insects wanted to attack him—so I force them away. I thought then he was from Graff—I thought he want to carry me off—steal me for Graff. I was not afraid of him—" Her smile broadened. "Especially with my guards jus' outside. So I stood agains' the wall, with him across the room, to talk to him."

"But why?" father demanded. "Child, why would you do a thing like this?"

"I think to find out if really he was from Graff; and if so, then I wanted to send a message. If Graff would give up his attack upon the earth, I would marry him as he wants. That was my message."

She said it so calmly! I could picture her standing there in her room, trying to bargain herself for the safety of another world. There was not one of us who could find a word to comment. I saw the tears spring to Hulda's eyes.

ZETTA went on unmoved, heedless of our expressions. "I tell the Braun this. But he was not—that seems sure—he was not sen' by Graff. He stood of a sudden with a knife—a long knife of the kind we use in Garla to cut the pods. He jump for me—he would kill me. It was then I screamed. In the room I avoided him for a moment—and then my guards came in." She gestured. "The res' you know—and there you have now the truth—all of it."

Hulda took Zetta in her arms. "You strange little thing Zetta, you mustn't do anything like this—"

Father said: "If Graff had got your message, he would trick you. Zetta, promise me you won't try that again. Will you promise?"

She eyed him. "I think perhaps I may not get the chance."

Kean said: "He tried—that Braun—to murder her. He was from Brea—not from Graff."

"Yes," said Zetta. "I think that is so."

"I'm going before the Council at noon," said father. "I'll have this out with them—Zetta, if you're going to force me, I'll put you under guard so you won't be able to do anything foolish—Kean, I want you to tell the Council I'm bringing my son, and two young friends. Earthmen—they must hear us now—"

"Yes," said Kean solemnly. "The people are excited, interest' that men of earth are here. But most interest' in Graff. He promises big things for Garla—" Kean was very solemn. "The gov'ment is making mistake. There are too many Brauns here. At the border—I tell them jus' now that out of our border something mus' be wrong."

He was talking mainly to father, but his gaze seemed involuntarily swinging to Hulda. "At our border they are not checking the Brauns out as they should. Or at leas' not sending the reports back to us. All night—none have come. I have sen' messengers to see what is wrong—"

Father turned to us. "You understand? The authorities have grown suddenly lax—"

"I'll tell you why," said Freddie. "They're satisfied, since Graff is going to attack earth, that they have no immediate cause to fear him, or his people. Maybe, too, they think that when he comes back, laden with spoils, Garla will benefit—"

"That is it," Kean interrupted. "He tells our people that—exactly that. It is not our gov'ment which is tempt' into greed—it is the people—"

Father said: "Well, the authorities are making a mistake, Kean. This Graff—you believe it as well as I do—is playing a double game. You know he means no good to Garla. The insect workers—you say there are a great many of them missing?"

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"Yes, I am order to-day a checking of them. Many—a thousan' as you say it—seem gone—"

"Gone?" I echoed. "What does that mean? Gone where?"

Kean waved his slim white hand. "Over the border? Per'aps—I do not know. It is ver' strange—"

"Smuggling them out!" said father to us. "You understand? There are no insect workers in the Braun city. Graff is here, talking—blandly protesting friendship, with his insidious lures of gain from his earth conquest—and all the while he's secretly smuggling out our insects—"

Kean had turned away momentarily to Hulda. "My trial, it finish last night. They gave the verdic' jus' now—I am said, innocent."

Hulda's face brightened; she took his hands. "Oh, Kean, I'm so glad. Father, the verdict has cleared him!"

"Yes," he said quietly. "Thank you, Hulda."

I whispered to Dan: "Father said you'd have to ask Hulda why Kean brought his captives to Garla instead of delivering them up to the Brauns. I can tell you why."

"As I stood in the Ray, the red things were howling around me, and their faces and actions were so grotesque that I laughed aloud. But I thought mirthlessly, 'Why, this is madness' "

It was obvious, seeing Kean's earnest, flushed face as Hulda congratulated him.

"Why?" demanded Dan.

"Because he's fascinated by her. Look at him—"

"Oh, he is?" Dan's expression was a study. "He is, is he?" And then he laughed. "Well, you can't blame him, can you?"

"No," I said, "you can't."

Kean left presently; and Dan made a studied, but very graceful attempt to be friendly. Both Hulda and Kean knew what he meant. Kean's handclasp was

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firm and cordial; his gaze into Dan's eyes was unfaltering. He carried himself then —and indeed, always—with a very manly dignity worthy of any one's admiration. When he was gone, Hulda turned to Dan, flung her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Dan, you're a darling."

THE morning was well advanced when we started with father from "Under Gardens." He wanted to show us the city; we would finish at the government house —I call it that for the want of a better term—and make our plea to the Council. I was not aware then what thoughts and vague plans possessed Dan and Freddie; but for my own part, my mind was roaming upon what father had said: "With your youth and strength and daring we might even try to make away with the Garlands' weapons. Get them to earth—"

Why not? I determined that what was shown me of the city and the government this morning, I would see with eyes and mind open to watch every opportunity. And I must get a chance to plan alone, with Dan and Freddie.

Hulda and Zetta were determined to appear before the Council with us. Just as we started, Freddie said abruptly: "Professor Vanderstuyft, fix it so we can go through the Scientists' Grotto, will you?"

His thoughts were running in the same channels as my own! Dan gave him a very significant nod of approval; and father said firmly: "I intend to. But it will likely be after the midday meal. I want you to see the Infra-red Control. The greatest power for good or evil in this world."

Zetta and Hulda stood apart from us at the doorway. Zetta called: "Shall we start? The guards are here, Professor Vanderstuyft—they say you insis' on having them with us."

A group of the brown insect things were ranged before our gate! I could not approach them at first without an inward shudder—a reluctance wholly involuntary, which made me revolt at their nearness. Jointed brown things crawling prone on the ground. Gruesome. Not alone because their size was full that of a man—gruesome, in the way they sometimes stood upright upon three hind legs; other legs dangling like arms; head, grotesquely wearing a single, multiple-lens eye; antennae, like arms waving above the head.

Gruesome for all this—and more gruesome for a crude leather jacket strapped around them in the fashion of a garment. Things—living things—more than giant insects as we of earth would conceive the term; yet less than humans. Some stood erect now; they eyed my father as one to whom they must look for commands. Others crawled unheeding along the edge of the fence—ghastly! Horrible! One stopped, half raised itself, and eyed me with a calculating stare that turned me cold.

We started. Some of the insects remained about the house; eight went with us, four of them slithering along on each side of us. It was full daylight now. The sunlight came down through the jungle ceiling in a subdued yellow glow. There was a street up there; I could see the straight lines of a causeway laid upon the top of the foliage; figures moving along it. We were under a portion of the city. Father had said so; and now, almost at once, we came to the foot of an incline which led us upward.

"This way," said father. "Take it slowly. These cursed things will hold our weight, but I never feel very comfortable on them."

We left the solid ground upon which Under Gardens was built, and I confess I never felt comfortable either, until we were back again. The inclined causeway was some twenty feet wide. It wound steeply upward through the forest growth, with a ten-foot space cleared over it like a tunnel.

It was built of porous tree-trunks, lashed together with a heavy vegetable fiber laid on them for a walking surface. Its framework was bound to the trees and the thick vines which grew everywhere throughout this gigantic forest tangle. The whole structure bent and swayed beneath our weight as we advanced up it. I was reminded of the old-time giant bamboo bridges of Japan.

We went up through some two hundred feet of the jungle and came abruptly into the broad daylight of its upper surface. We were in the heart of the city they called Garla; this small locality where we emerged was the center of population of all Xenephrene.

"Here," said father, "come up here for a minute—I'll show you how it lies—Zetta, keep them back."

A crowd of people already was gather-

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ing, staring at us silently. Father waved them away; and murmured a queer guttural command to our insect convoy. The things lay quiet in a group. Near at hand, on a tree-trunk framework, was a small platform some twenty feet in the air with a ladder leading up to it.

"Come up," said father. "We can see better—a jumping platform, as I call it."

WE MOUNTED, and gazed upon as strange a scene as ever I could have imagined would be spread before me. The surface of Xenephrene here was covered, for an area of perhaps five miles square, with this dense forest growth. Its top—two hundred feet above the ground—was tangled and matted into an undulating upper surface.

Upon this forest top, the main section of the city of Garla was built. The streets—we seemed now to be on one of the main ones—were narrow, crooked roadways of split porous logs, bound with matting. The tops of the jungle vines projected with waving branches between them.

Houses lined the streets, fiber shacks of every size and shape, with large empty areas like gardens between them. Cubical, oval, triangular—some low like a bungalow—others tall and narrow as towers. Flimsy vegetable structures, with matted roofs to shed the rain; with windows, doorways, sometimes twenty feet above the roadway. Some of the houses were set like nests below the street level, in the vegetation itself, with entrance from the roof. Others clung between the trunks of taller projecting branches, bound there with living vines, half hidden by leaves and giant flowers.

At intervals were platforms like the one upon which we stood. The street nearest to us was most closely lined with houses; the fronts were open, with what seemed food displayed. The business district. Further away, with a great circular open space before it, was a large, broad structure. "The government house," said father. "An incline there leads down to the ground—the grottos are down there."

It was an amazing, colorful scene—I fear my words are futile, wholly inadequate to picture it. The familiar blue vault of the heavens was above us. White clouds, tinged with a vague purple. The familiar sun—with a dim purple haze in the air breaking its tropical heat and glare.

This five mile area of city, laid upon the jungle top, all seemed incredibly flimsy. It swayed everywhere in the gentle morning breeze. All the vegetation was gigantic, and flimsy—porous like our bamboo stalks, or banana trees.

Father commented: "Nothing living weighs very much here. All living organism seems constructed with strange lack of solidity compared to our earthly standards."

The lack of weight was everywhere apparent. Great brown vines and trees, branches with giant green, red, and purple leaves, huge colorful flowers. But with a machete I could have hacked it away, slashed through the stoutest trunk with a single stroke. The houses! I felt, gazing at them, that I could rip them apart with my naked hands!

Zetta, both on earth and Xenephrene, weighed some eighteen pounds. There were white-faced, white-haired, half naked little children gazing now at us from the near-by houses—children who weighed a pound or two. Women passed us—in aspect save for their flowing white hair, not unlike peasant women of the primitive, tropical cities of earth as they were before the Great Change—but these women weighed twenty or twenty-five pounds! Men in crude leather garments, bare-legged, bare-armed, white hair flowing about their ears, some with small oval kindly faces, with no hairgrowth on them; these men might weigh from twenty-five to thirty pounds—no more.

All flimsy! Everything—it brought me a sudden sense of power. Why, in a hand-to-hand fight I could smash a dozen of these men! We of earth were solid; the platform bent beneath our weight as we stood there; Dan's bulk tipped its unrailed corner until he nearly fell, lurching backward hastily to safety. Had he fallen, I felt he might have crashed on through the street itself, down through the forest to the ground. No wonder father had demanded his home built down where it was!

I HAVE not pictured the strangest aspect of all. The city was busy with its activities. There seemed no vehicles here. Pedestrians only—moving about their daily tasks. Strange, weird movements! They walked along the streets in easy, graceful leaps. Fifteen feet at a stride. They climbed down into the vegetation;

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or leaped to a housetop. A man came from a house doorway. It was in the upper story—thirty feet from the street. He stared at us—waved his hand in a gesture of greeting to father and Zetta; then he leaped into the air, over the road, landing in the notch of a tree; and from there dropped soundlessly down out of sight.

From other platforms like the one on which we were standing, occasionally a man would take a greater leap. Not far away, there was one high tower, with platform at its top. Beyond it, the upper surface of the forest sloped down to where, half a mile away in that direction, the city ended at the ground level. There were broad fields of loam off there, evidently under cultivation.

"Look!" said father. "There's a man climbing the tower—he's going down to the ground-fields."

He stood poised on the platform a moment, and then leaped. It was more the sort of leap Zetta had made in Porto Rico. This man spread flaring folds of his leather garment. They hung like wings from his outstretched arms. He sailed horizontally, head first, from the tower top, over the forest slope and landed down on the ground nearly half a mile away. I have seen, in Switzerland, a ski jumper parallel the sloping ground in a leap something like that.

"Quite some jumper," Freddie commented.

"That is Rowlande," said Zetta to father.

"One of Garla's athletes," father explained. "They enjoy sport here—the sail jump is a favorite contest. Over there—" He gestured. "That open area, with the curved line of branches standing up—that's what you might call our stadium."

"Graff speaks there to the people tonight," said Zetta.

Father did not comment on that. He pointed out where in the distance the vegetation ended, and the open fields began; with other distant patches of jungle here and there; and at the far horizon a purple line of metal mountains.

Hulda said: "This is the city, here around the government house. But most of the population lives in the rural section. You can see the houses."

Down in the fields were occasional structures like farmhouses. They dotted the distant landscape; and I could see that the other patches of jungle had houses and streets on them, villages like this larger one of Garla. Father said: "You think all our agriculture is down there on the ground level. It isn't. Those pods, for instance—see them?"

A street or so away there was what I had thought was a large open square. The vine tops were covered with great brown pods. I saw now, as father pointed it out, that the pods grew everywhere under us in the forest.

"The pith is one of our staple vegetables," said father. "Those pods grow there because they are planted. Grafted, so to speak. The seedlings are raised in the ground soil, then grafted into vine fiber. The vines are used as a soil. The agriculture is here in the air, as well as on the ground. There are several vegetables grown in the vine soil."

Men and women were working in the field he indicated. And insects were there. I could see them crawling up from beneath, carrying pods; men and women were picking the pods also—and a line of insects, dwarfed by distance to look like ants, were carrying the pods along a street.

We presently descended from the platform and walked, with our insects again beside us, along the causeway streets toward the government house.

The people crowded around us. Once, the press of them added to our own weight, caused the street and half a dozen of the neighboring houses to sag alarmingly. No one seemed to mind but ourselves; but when Zetta shouted to disperse them they went willingly enough—dropping down into the foliage, or leaping nimbly away with their uncanny movements. My self-satisfied sense of power was somewhat marred by the realization of how we must have appeared to them. Chained by our weight to a slow, dragging walk, fearful every moment that we might fall.

As we went along, father explained the city activities. All normal enough for a primitive, peasant civilization. He told us, too, how most of the workers sold their products to the government, exchanging their credits by buying from the government other things they needed. One of our ancient Indian civilizations of earth had a somewhat similar system. And these super-modern people of Xenephrene had chosen it as best of all! Strange commentary!

We saw the government storehouses. A huge building set in an excavation of the

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forest, with its foundations on the ground; we passed through to its top floor. Food of every sort was stored here; merchandise of every kind involved in this primitive life was here on display.

"The manufactured stuff comes mostly from the Brauns," said father.

It was obvious to me why these Garlands did not want to champion the earth against Graff and his Brauns. Here on Zenephrene—however much the Garlands might differ from the Brauns in ideals and ways of living—the two races had their interests closely interwoven.

We of earth were the real aliens. What did they care for us? I could even imagine that the Braun conflict with earth might serve to draw the Garlands to them, rather than estrange. Families of our earth people often quarrel, reuniting only when an outside enemy comes in conflict with one of their factions.

It was, I fancied, upon this human instinct which Graff now was playing. Coupling with it an appeal to the latent cupidity which lies in every human breast. He was succeeding. I knew that at this moment the Garlands—people and government—felt more friendly toward the Brauns than they ever had before. Father and Kean were convinced that Graff was playing a double game. What could it be? He might be trying to trick the Garlands to serve his own ends. But how?

STRANGE walk we had that morning through the city of Garla! My words convey the merest sketch of its strangeness. Insect workers everywhere. Patient, silent, methodical as well-trained domestic animals, yet with a far higher intelligence. I gazed at what might have been a double line of giant red ants, carrying boxes down an incline into the forest. Patient workers; suddenly I was struck with the feeling that there was a sullen resentment upon them; a smoldering hate for their human masters.

We saw a few Brauns; swaggering fellows flushed with a new sense of their importance. They were dressed in many complex garments. At sight of them the cynical thought came to me that in clothes and manner they might have been a burlesque of us on modern earth. They eyed us with hostile stares.

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These Thin Gillettes sure have the stuff,
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Save Extra Money! Get The Big New Economy Package, 12 For 27c

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"There's Kean," said Hulda. We were beyond the storehouse, back on the street. The government house was only a block or so away.

Kean approached. "I have been sen' to you from the Council. They will see you, Professor, but no one else."

Father was taken aback. "You mean, not my son—nor his friends—"

"Jus' you. So they sen' me to say. They would have you come now."

"I'll come," said father grimly. "Look here, Kean—"

"They tell me, Professor, they will have nothing definite to say to you this morning. After Graff's meeting tonight, they will decide."

"What do you mean by that?" father demanded.

Dan spoke up. "The idea is, if the Garland public seems enthusiastic about Graff's invasion—then they'll turn us down. Isn't that it, Kean?"

"Yes, I fear that is it. But if our people would favor helping earth—"

"Don't worry," exclaimed Freddie. "They won't."

A commotion near us checked him. Zetta murmured: "Graff!"

A huge figure of a man was coming slowly along the cross street, with a half admiring, wholly awed throng of the Garlands around him. He saw us, waved the crowd back and, with a leap over the thirty feet of intervening street, he stood before us. Our insect guards rose upright, eyed father, and stood alert. Behind me I saw three young Garland men, with metal objects like small projectors in their hands. Government street guards. They were watching Graff narrowly, but they did not interfere.

"Professor Vanderstuyft—" He spoke English; his manner was courteous, but authoritative. "I wish to speak with Zetta—one moment."

The man who was about to try to conquer our earth! I stood tense, and an awe of which I was secretly ashamed swept me as I gazed at him. A giant fellow, six and a half feet tall, at the very least. Broad-shouldered, slim-hipped, straight and muscular.

He wore a tubular leather garment, strapped in at the waist, falling like a short flaring skirt to his bare knees. A short, gaudy jacket over it; shoes with broad, flat heels, and pointed toes, curled up and fastened to his ankles with ornamental metal chains. A heavy metal triangle hung at his chest; chains of gleaming metal hung from his shoulders to his elbows; his muscular forearms were bare, with heavy metal bands at the wrists. A metal band circled his forehead, with the close-clipped white hair under it.

A man of perhaps forty years. Deep-set blue eyes; heavy white eyebrows—a beardless face. A strong, handsome face. He was smiling now, but I could see a ruthless determination in the set of his square, cloven jaw, and more than a hint of cruelty in the lines of his thin, firm lips. A swaggering, arrogant fellow. But he was more than that. In his voice, his bearing, I read a consciousness of his own power, a dignity about him, more than a mere arrogant swagger. A kingly scoundrel, contemptuous by instinct of all his fellows.

He was saying something to Zetta in his own tongue. She stood before him, gazing calmly up into his face—a child in stature beside his huge bulk.

Father said sharply: "Speak in my own language, please! What you can have to say to Zetta need not be secret from us."

Graff smiled again—a smile of faintly amused tolerance. "As you please. Zetta, I hear there was an attack made upon you this dawn. A Braun, they say, came to carry you away." His voice was very gentle; hate rose in me for the gentleness of it—the calm dignity of his regard.

"Yes," she said.

"I want you to know, Zetta, I was not concern in that. Do you believe me?"

She hesitated. "I think so."

"I want you to think so, for I was not concern in it. I would not harm you. That you know?"

"Yes," she said.

"That is all. Excep'—Zetta, I am tomorrow going to earth—I want to conquer it for you—I want all its riches and its pleasures to be for you. Won't you come with me? You are master of yourself by the laws here. This earthman, who thinks to control you—"

"Enough!" interrupted father. "She doesn't want to hear that kind of talk, Graff."

The gentleness faded from his voice. "I speak with her, not you. Let her answer."

Zetta burst out: "What you plan to do on earth is wrong, Graff! If you think to please me, stay here! Stay here on Xenephrene—"

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He interrupted her gently: "You are misled, Zetta. You live with earth people—they mislead you. Zetta, will you come with me—"

"No," she said.

Regret swept his face. If this were acting, it was a good brand. A very kingly scoundrel, this! "You hurt me ver' deeply, Zetta." A faint irony tinged his words and his glance.

Her quiet gaze was measuring him. "You want me to love you—that you have always said. You go about it wrongly, Graff."

He was openly amused. "Do you think so? When I am succeeded—then you will be proud of me." His tone changed. "Oh, Zetta, you know that then I will do anything for you. Everything I have shall be yours."

I could see her hesitate, part her lips to speak, then close them again. She was on the verge, here before all of us, of trying to bribe him with herself. A shudder must have swept her. But she said: "You are willing to please me—when you have had your way on earth—but not now."

No fool, this frail little girl! Her own smile was ironical. "If I could trus' you, Graff, we might—" She checked herself.

"What?" he demanded.

"Nothing. I am finish."

Abruptly he swung from her. His gaze roved me as I stood suddenly conscious of my clenched fists; Freddie beside me; Dan towering over us, yet shorter than Graff. Hulda, angry and half afraid, clinging to Dan. And Kean, a little apart—Graff fastened upon Kean, and his thin lips twisted with contempt.

"Ah, there is my little criminal traitor!"

I saw Kean stiffen; for an instant I thought he would hurl himself bodily upon his accuser. Graff evidently thought it, also. He added calmly: "You are quite safe here, Kean. If you attack me, you would be stopp'—I am guest here of Garla, as you know. And for the same reason, I cannot do as I would like with you." His lean fingers were working; he raised his large hand with a twisting gesture, and dropped it. "You are quite safe here. Some other time—"

"Come," said father to us. "Enough of this. Come, Zetta."

Again Graff's glance swept us. "So these are some more of my little earth enemies? Look well upon me! I am Graff, future Emperor of the Earth!" He said it in a way hardly to be described. An amused, an utter contempt. My hot anger boiled. Why, this fellow, for all his insolence, his giant stature, was a flimsy thing of forty or fifty pounds! I became aware that I had launched myself at him, and Freddie was holding me.

"Easy, Peter! Stop it! You'll have us all in jail!"

Graff had not moved, his expressions unchanged save that perhaps his amused contempt was greater. "Your littlest fellow seems to have the mos' sense. Zetta, perhaps I will see you again."

He turned slowly, and with a lazy bound vanished down the cross street.

CHAPTER XIV

BRAVE, FOOLISH LITTLE ZETTA!

IT WAS a crowded day, with our morning walk through the city and our meeting with Graff. And from a distance we had seen the woman Brea. An arrogant giantess. A fitting mate for him, no doubt. "Empress of the Earth"—she was already calling herself that. Kean informed us she was going to address the meeting to-night—to tell the people of Garla what wonderful things would be brought back to them by Graff when he returned.

Father visited the Garland Council. He returned discouraged and indignant. They would have none of our pleas now. They did not want to see me or Dan or Freddie officially, to talk politics. Politely, they requested father to leave their affairs alone. After Graff's meeting they would give us their decision.

"I warned them," father exclaimed. "What will happen at this meeting to-night, I don't know. But I feel it bodes no good for Garla. Graff is treacherous to the very core of him. You'll see—they'll all see!"

Freddie, Dan and I, had a brief consultation while father was at the Council. "What we'll do," said Dan, "will have to be on our own. Your father, Peter, has lived here, and likes these people. Even he can't see them as they are. Doubtless they did grow altruistic—peace-loving—all that he told us. But humans are humans. They think they see a way to personal gain. This government is greedy to get whatever it can out of Graff—"

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Freddie commented: "I wouldn't trust a shock from any of these people with a broken battery. Graff is the worst. Imagine little Zetta trying to bargain with a villain like Graff!" Freddie's admiration for Zetta was profound. "But she ought to be watched. Heaven knows what a girl like that will try and do!"

"I'd trust Kean," said Dan. "He's the only one."

We argued to very little purpose from a dozen angles. I think all three of us were sorry we had not leaped upon Graff —made an end to him at once, up there on the Garla street corner.

"It would have been simple," said Dan. "But—killing a man in broad daylight—they'd have had us locked up by now—I wonder how they punish murder in this place."

We had Kean to ourselves later in the day. It was before we went to the Scientists' Grotto. Kean said he had never seen the Garland weapons, though he knew where they were kept, under heavy guard. But he thought that during the evening meeting Graff was to hold, he would perhaps be able to plan a way to get into the grotto arsenal. With the physical force we three of earth were capable of using we could break into it.

During the meeting, attention would all be centered there. Most of the guards would be at the meeting. Kean planned to investigate conditions at the arsenal —and report to us. If we could get the weapons—get them to our vehicle— We would try attacking Graff first, here in Garla. Or, preferably, as Kean pointed out, catch him on his way to the Braun city. And then, if we brought the wrath of the Garlands upon us, we would all escape to earth. Kean said very solemnly: "I trus' Zetta's woman conscience on this. She heard you talking of it this morning. Did you know that?"

"No," I said.

"Well, she did—we Garlands have ver' sharp ears. I ask her advice. You see, that man Graff called me traitor. That hurt—I was traitor, from the way he sees it. Not again would I be traitor —mos' of all, not to my own worl'. But I ask Zetta. She says for us to take the Garland weapons to save the other worl' is just." He was very earnest. "Not to take anything which by losing my Garla would be hurt. There is such a thing. If you planned to steal it, Zetta and I would not permit—"

"The Infra-red Control?" said Freddie.

"Yes. That, Zetta and I would not let you touch. The ordinar' weapons—of those Garla has many. The loss of some will help your worl', and cannot harm mine."

A very manly fellow—quaintly dignified as he stood earnestly explaining. One Garland at least, whom we could trust. And Zetta.

We said nothing to father, or to Hulda, or Zetta. In mid afternoon, before starting on this visit to the grotto which father had arranged, he took an hour and told us more of the strange science of this world. I feel that it would be out of place for me to set it forth in detail here. It is not my purpose to encumber this personal narrative with scientific data. Volumes of scientific text books will be written concerning Xenephrene, with father's voluminous notes as a basis. So I have summarized here merely such fundamentals necessary to make clear the strange adventures on earth, so briefly on Xenephrene and back again on earth, into which my family, friends and myself were plunged.

The basis, father told us, of all natural scientific phenomena on Xenephrene was an entity called *Reet*. An "etheric fluid." A "movement of detached electrons." He used both phrases. In its essence, Reet, he said, was an enigma. A force "akin perhaps to our electricity." It existed in nature—in the rain, the clouds, the air. It was the growing, life-giving essence of all vegetable and animal organism.

Just as we of earth, in a wide variety of forms, had learned to harness electricity, so on Xenephrene, Reet was harnessed. On earth a common electrical current, a bolt of lightning, a magnetic field, fluorescence of a Crooke's tube, the heat of an electric coil, a giant, leaping electric spark, the X-ray, radio waves—all are akin. We know that now; we learn it more surely every year. On Xenephrene, a score of scientific phenomena were all manifestations of Reet, in various forms, under various abnormal conditions.

OUR earth now is using Reet for the antigravity vehicles which now are adventuring into Space; and our scientists say that Reet itself is but another form of electrical force.

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Father told us how our vehicle operated. The force of gravity itself is merely a vibration flowing between two material bodies, connecting them with a tendency to draw near, to coalesce—a fundamental tendency in all nature when in vibratory contact. The Reet current, applied in a form abnormal to nature, slows down and stops this gravitational vibration.

It is, to me at least, a deep subject; I leave it to father's text books. But with several of the Reet rays, we were to have diabolical dealings! Their control of the hidden, unseen forces of nature—we saw a little of it that afternoon in the Scientists' Grotto.

The grotto, at least this one to which we were admitted, seemed to be a series of underground passages; converging into a number of underground rooms. Workshops; laboratories; storehouses, perhaps, of weapons and equipment of war. We were shown none of that; we saw, indeed, but one room. Enough to leave us shuddering.

On the ground, beneath the forest, we came to the tunnel entrance. A guard—a man standing there, with half a dozen of the insect things lying watchfully beside him, passed us in. A tunnel sloping downward; smooth, gleaming, metallic walls; shifting purple and red lights; a steady movement of artificially controlled air for ventilation; vague, pungent smells; in the distance, ahead of us, the murmur and throb of machinery.

It was like plunging into yet another brand new world. Outside the grotto, the Garlands seemed a primitive, pastoral race. This was like a plunge, centuries into the future. An inferno of the future.

From a cross tunnel, the sudden whine of a dynamo tore at us. A wave of gas, not unlike chlorine, Freddie said, brought us up gasping and choking, until a blast of fresh cool air fortunately dissipated it. A place of shifting lurid lights; workmen passed us—sometimes with masks, but all wearing what seemed heavy insulated garments.

An inferno, frightening in its strangeness. Frightening, also, in another way. The half-seen world of the Infra-red had never left my consciousness since I first set foot upon Xenephrene. It was with me all that morning in the upper streets of Garla, but I had ignored it.

Here, in the gloom and weirdness of the grotto, the crimson chattering things seemed to gain reality. My imagination perhaps. I do not know. But when once we entered the tunnel, I was newly conscious of them. As though this were their home—their very breeding place. Or perhaps, their jail, where they were held imprisoned—sullen, resentful, watchful of any chance to escape. All fancy, yet as I was soon to learn, it had a very real basis of fact.

My fancy was oversharp; my nerves taut. An insect loitered idle against the burnished tunnel-wall; a purple ball of light was over it. I fancied the thing tensed itself as though to spring upon me. I did not breathe again until we were past it.

A scientist was leading us now. Freddie, Dan, myself and father—we had left the girls at home. We came to the barred entrance to a room. Its heavy metal door suggested the circular door to a vault in a New York bank. Nothing flimsy here; solid metal, everywhere. My heart sank. Kean had said that with our great physical strength we might be able to force our way in; it did not seem very reasonable.

A scientist met us. He smiled gravely at father—a short, slim man, garbed in smooth, dull black. His white hair was clipped close; heavy bull's-eye goggles made his face grotesque. His ears were clasped with a device in appearance not unlike a radio headphone; he removed it, stepping over its dangling wires as he laid it aside.

"Come in," said father softly to us. "This is the control room. I wanted you to see it."

A low, black-vaulted room. I could see nothing but a small railed area on a two-foot metal platform in the room's center. Within this low metal railing, on a bare flooring of burnished metal, two small mechanisms stood side by side. Two transparent globes, each about a foot in diameter. Within one, a fluorescence of purple; the other held a crimson glow. Wires connected them to near-by batteries; wires ran to a bank of indicators—dials and pressure gauges. Above the neck of each globe, fastened to it, was a small grid of wire; from one, a vague, violet-purple beam streamed out; and from the other, the beam was crimson.

I could barely see the scientist as he moved about us; there was no light save these purple and crimson beams.

The man seemed adjusting his goggles,

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and replacing his headphone. Then he moved a switch. The crimson globe sprang into greater intensity. The beam from it deepened; it seemed streaming out across the room, through the further wall of metal rock—streaming out and opening to my gaze a blackness of distance unfathomable. A murmur was coming from it! A myriad tiny growls and screams! The crimson sounds! The red things lurking around me responded to it! Or were they making the sounds? I could not tell. They seemed rushing out from the unseen, into visibility—searching—one almost seemed plucking at me.

FATHER murmured, "It is bringing the Infra-red nearer to us. Or swinging us nearer to it—all the same. Bringing the two planes closer together. That ray permeates the whole of Xenephrene. Like a broadcasted radio wave on earth—it goes everywhere! If it persisted—a day—an hour—the Infra-red would be let loose upon us! Possessing us—"

The scientist was saying, "Let one of them try it. This is very weak—"

"Try it, Peter." Father drew me forward. "Stand, there in the red glow—just a moment. When you—feel too queer—come back out."

Every instinct in me revolted, but I yielded to him as he shoved me gently into the red glow. It bathed me with a tingling warmth. Or was it burning?

The red things were howling around me. One came up—a great crimson shadow. It seemed condensing into the form of a man. Suddenly I heard myself laughing. Why, this was funny! It looked like me! A crimson shadow of Peter! Or was it my evil spirit? Its face, malignant, like some diabolical travesty of my own, came close and leered at me. I was trying to get into my body. I laughed; but I was thinking, "Why, this is madness—"

Father's hands jerked me back into the darkness. I stood trembling; my face and hands were flushed, as though inflamed.

"Madness indeed," said father, and then I knew that I had shouted the words aloud. "They think that the Infra-red is perhaps the evil nature of man held submerged. A greater intensity of the crimson sound would have burned you." I recalled how Freddie and Dan had been burned in their fight with the intruder that night the cylinder arrived. "And a still greater intensity would reduce you to the plane of the Infra-red—dissolve you into Nothingness—the fate of Davis and Robinson, when they attacked the crimson sound. Near New York, with their aeros—remember?"

I did indeed. The scientist moved back the switch; the red glow faded. Father said, "On earth we have no such condition. Here on Xenephrene, the subworld is always striving for mastery. The purple glow from Pyrena is nature's adjustment; it holds in check, banishes the sub-red world. But since Xenephrene came into our sunlight, things are changing. Our sunlight seems favorable to the Infra-red. So an artificial adjustment has to be made. The purple haze you see in Xenephrene's air—it all comes from this little globe."

The purple globe now was active—the beam deepened. Around me the red things seemed vanishing. A great peace, a stillness came to the vaulted room. I had not realized under what subconscious strain I had been laboring until it was removed.

Freddie said, "Why use the crimson ray at all? Why not just the purple ray, and banish the red things completely?"

"The red-world cannot be banished completely, here on Xenephrene," father answered. "Too great a use of the purple—it would swing our plane too far toward the Ultra-violet—be injurious to human life. The best balance which can be maintained—that is the purpose of these two globes—this control room."

A solemnity, greater than I had ever heard before came to father's voice. "The Brauns had no spreading rays on earth, like these. They tell me, here in Garla, that these two little globes are the only ones of their kind in existence. Without them, in a month, or a few months at the most, Xenephrene, bathed in our sunlight, would be overrun with the demons of the Infra-red! A world gone mad!"

"A WORLD gone mad!" His words rang shudderingly in my head all the rest of that afternoon; echoed through the evening meal, and those tense hours while we waited for the time when we were going to hear Graff's speech in the stadium. "A world gone mad!" Father meant Xenephrene. But with what diabolical, prophetic vision,

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my thoughts kept swinging to earth! A world gone mad!

From our visit to the grotto we returned home where we had left the girls. I was suddenly impatient to get there. A feeling was upon me that it had been wrong to leave them. Would Zetta take this opportunity to slip away? To attempt to see Graff?

My fears were dispelled. The insects were quietly patrolling the grounds. The girls were busy about the house. Hulda whispered to me, "We're getting ready to leave."

"Leave?"

"Yes. If you should be successful to-night—if you get the weapons—you might want to leave for earth at once."

And we had thought to keep our secret from these girls! Hulda added, "Zetta is coming with us. Kean also. Neither has any ties here—"

Zetta coming! If only everything would work out like this—

With the afternoon passed, I thought no more of Zetta's threatened attempt to see Graff. After the evening meal, we all tried to sleep for a time. But I was restless. After an hour in our room with Freddie and Dan, I slipped away to the roof to smoke alone. I found it vacant; dim with straggling moonlight.

I had no thought of Zetta, save that she was resting beneath me in the house. She was coming back with us to earth. When these terrible times were over, I would take her in my arms—claim her—I wondered if she loved me. I am not unduly vain; truly it seemed at once impossible, but inevitable—

I have no idea how long, with roaming fancy, I sat there. Half an hour perhaps. Above me a figure suddenly came fluttering down from the foliage, landed lightly on the roof, within a few feet of where, in a stunned surprise, I was sitting. It was Zetta. Her face was flushed; she was panting.

"Zetta!" I sprang to my feet.

"Oh—is it you, Peter? I did not know you were up here."

"Where have you been? I thought you were downstairs. Zetta, have you been up to see—"

"Let go of me! Peter, don't do that! You hurt me! You—forget how strong you are!"

I had gripped her shoulders; I cast her hastily off. "Where have you been? What have you been doing?"

She eyed me. The impish smile was twitching at her lips. "You are ver' much like a master—you deman' knowing where I have been?"

"Yes. I do."

"Sit down." I sat in my chair and she sat crosslegged at my feet. "There. This is better."

"How did you get out?" I demanded. "Father said he was having you watched."

"He is. But he forget—those insects know me better than himself. I took them with me."

She was smiling broadly. She added calmly, "I have run away from them, coming back. They will be here soon—I have been up to see Graff."

I knew it! I made no comment. She went on, as calmly, evenly as before. "I thought—before to-night when you three men try to get the Garland weapons—I thought I would make one las' try for Graff." She gestured. "I met him—up there on the street. We were alone—"

She saw my expression. She laughed. "Oh, no, Zetta is not a fool! We were alone so that none could hear us. But many were near. My own insects—and I made sure the city guards were close by, watching. I was quite safe."

She paused. But when I did not speak, she went on quietly.

"I have fail'. I tol' him openly that he—could have me for his wife, as you call it—" She was stumbling, but only for a moment. "I tol' him that. But when I tried to bargain—I am no fool—I tol' him I would have to be satisfy he would not trick me—then I saw it could not succeed. I could not trust him. That I could tell by the way he talked. Yet I believe he really thinks he loves me—"

She added the last words as though to herself.

I exclaimed: "Why would you make a sacrifice like that? Or perhaps it isn't such a sacrifice?"

Unworthy, churlish thing for me to say! The impulsive words were no sooner out than I hated myself for them.

Her wide eyes searched my face. "I forgive you—for saying that, Peter. I would almos' rather die than be his wife." For just an instant she yielded to the shuddering emotion she was holding in check; then again she was calmly imperturbable.

"You say, would it be a sacrifice? Of

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me—yes. But what am I? Jus' one small woman. I am thinking of your earth—all those millions of people—"

Brave, foolish little Zetta!

If she could have trusted Graff, of course, it would have been best. But I did not feel it so at the moment. She was more to me, this one small woman sitting now at my feet, than all the millions of distant earth. I interrupted her gently.

"You were going to sacrifice some one else, Zetta. Some one—"

Her face turned quickly up; her wide eyes were on mine. I found myself holding her against my knees. Ah, then I felt the strength of the force between us! "Zetta, don't you know I love you? Can't you feel it—as I feel it?"

She forced herself back from me; did not rise, sat leaning backward, pushing at my knees as though holding us apart against the surge that was drawing us together.

"Peter! Peter, don't say that yet!"

"Why not? It's true. I love—"

"No! You can't be sure. It—will sweep us if you talk like this."

Sweep us, indeed! Love! It was that! Love physical, mental and spiritual. The trinity—complete. I knew it! I heard my pleading voice telling her so.

"No, Peter! Trus' me—I understan' better than you. Peter—smile at me! Smile! Do not be so serious!"

She was so pathetically earnest! I strove for calmness. I smiled. "All right. There you are, Zetta."

I could feel her relax. Her hands left my knees; she sat on the roof-floor a few feet away from me.

"Thank you, Peter."

I laughed. "You're quite welcome." The stress of our emotion was broken. I lighted a cigarette. I felt quite calm, master of myself—and of her. Masterful, because now in my calmness, I knew I was unchanged. It was love, and I knew she loved me.

"I'll say it differently, Zetta. Listen: I love you. When we get through all this mess we're in—your world and mine—I'm going to marry you. There—that's calm enough, isn't it? Nothing peculiar about that, is there?"

Her surprise made me laugh again. She stammered. "Peter—you—do not ask—if I love you!"

"No. Why should I? I know it."

"But I am not sure, Peter."

"Of course, you are."

"I am not. Perhaps on earth your girls are able to judge when they feel a swift heap of emotion—"

"Yes," I said blandly. "That's it."

But I could not make her smile. She shook her head. "We of Xenephrene are different. The emotion—is not always to be trusted, Peter."

"Let's trust it," I said.

"No. I cannot—yet."

She was on her feet and I stood beside her.

"I think—I'm very glad we had these moments together, Peter."

She was about to leave me; I could not let her go. "You do love me, don't you? Say it!"

"I think—mos' likely—I do!" She gave a little jump; her lips brushed mine. Before I could catch her she was gone, down into the house leaving me alone.

CHAPTER XV

GRAFF'S TREACHERY

"IT'S time," said Hulda. "Shall we start?"

Another hour had passed. Zetta had not mentioned her escapade into the city to meet Graff; nor had I. We were ready now to start for Graff's meeting. It was our first adventure abroad at night on Xenephrene. We had been twice before up this incline into the streets of Garla; but this time it seemed very different.

A sense of evil lay heavy upon me. It was a cloudless night, with Pyrena, the moon, a great purple round disk. The forest was full of purple shadows; the red murmuring things were abroad, and I blessed with a new understanding, this purple light which held them in check. We ascended the incline and came upon Garla's main street. The two girls were shrouded in cloaks of white. Father the same. Once, Hulda raised her cloak like a hood over her head until Freddie asked her to lower it.

"You look like a ghost in this moonlight." He laughed, but it was high-pitched and nervous, unlike him.

Dan whispered to me: "Kean is to join us at the stadium entrance. Do you think he will, Peter? If anything goes wrong—"

"We'll sit near the back," I whispered. "He'll find us. You and Freddie and I must sit together, where we can slip away."

Freddie edged toward us as we walked

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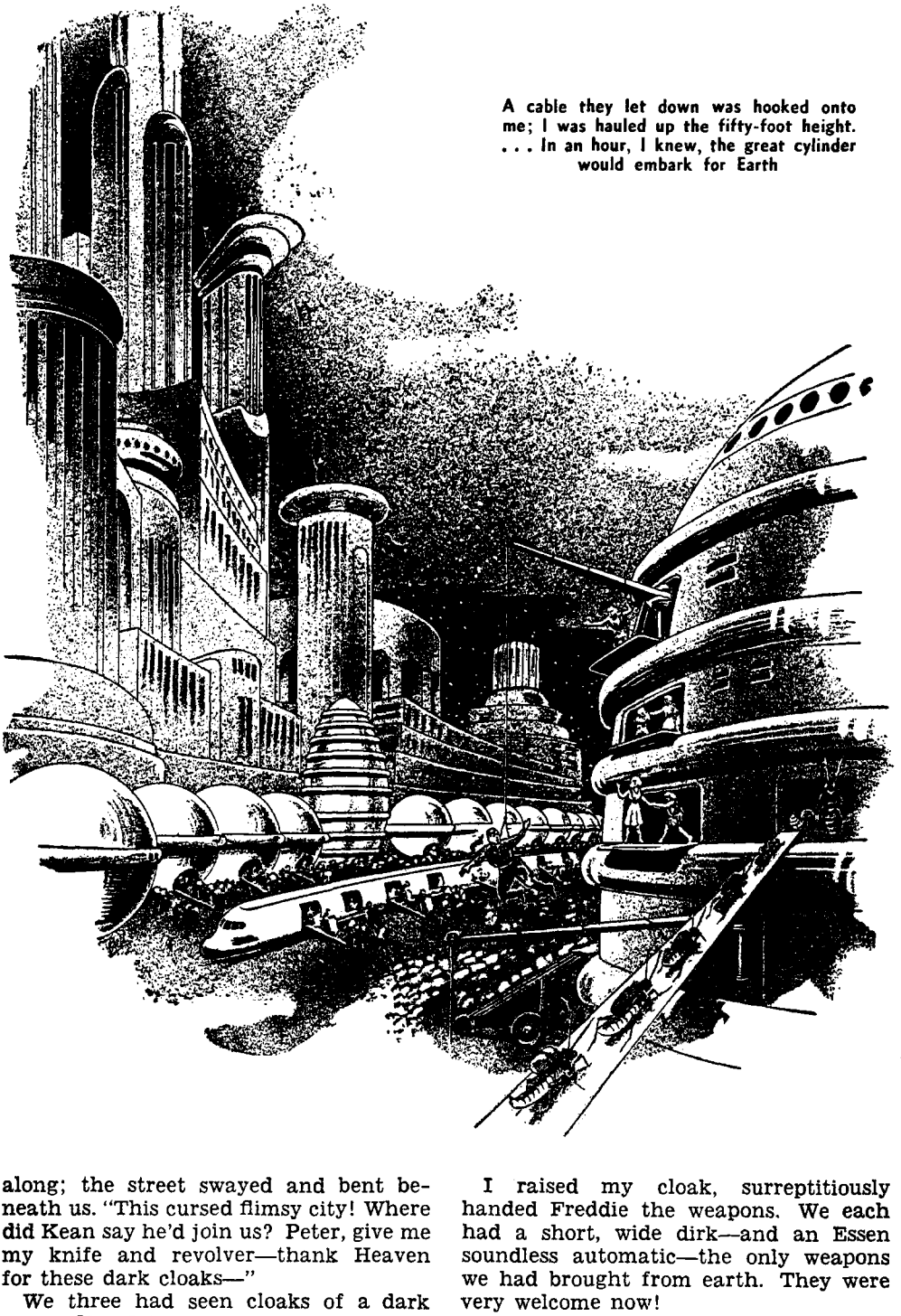

A cable they let down was hooked onto me; I was hauled up the fifty-foot height. . . . In an hour, I knew, the great cylinder would embark for Earth

along; the street swayed and bent beneath us. "This cursed flimsy city! Where did Kean say he'd join us? Peter, give me my knife and revolver—thank Heaven for these dark cloaks—"

We three had seen cloaks of a dark woven fiber lying in one of the rooms of Under Gardens. We had wanted to wear them, and father had acquiesced.

I raised my cloak, surreptitiously handed Freddie the weapons. We each had a short, wide dirk—and an Essen soundless automatic—the only weapons we had brought from earth. They were very welcome now!

"Move back," I whispered to Dan. "Father will wonder what we're talking about."

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We were determined to get into the grotto by whatever desperate expedient Kean would think possible of success. Father would approve—we did not doubt that. But he would want to go with us. That we did not desire. In the event of failure, we wanted him, at least, to remain in safety. He would not, very probably, be blamed by the Garlands for our attack. He would be left to look after Hulda. And—I added to myself—look after Zetta.

Shrouded in our cloaks, we hastened through Garla's tree-top streets. In the purple moonlight the dark houses seemed giant birds' nests; the giant leaves which occasionally hung over them were motionless in the still night air. A breathless silence brooded over everything. The houses showed occasional glows of light; but most of them seemed unoccupied. There were many pedestrians. All were going our way.

From a doorway a woman clutching a baby at her breast, gazed down on us with an obvious hostility. "A Braun," I thought. But she was not.

Hulda pointed her out—a Garland. From over us, as a crowd of young people went past in a leap, some one dropped a flower. A heavy thing—it struck Dan a blow on the shoulder which brought a startled curse from him. Hulda waved her white arm upward in a friendly gesture; but her face was very solemn.

"I don't like this," father murmured. "They're hostile—in all the months we've been here, it's never been like this."

Father had stopped. "I think we'll go back." He drew me aside. "It's only curiosity taking us here—we know what Graff will say to the people. The Garland government will decide against us to-morrow. The time is short, Peter—if we're going to do anything."

Father lowered his voice. "Look here, I want to get you three alone—without the girls. We'll have to try something desperate. Peter, if we let Graff get away from us—if he gets to earth—whatever we do, we ought to try it to-night."

I drew him along. Good old father—he would have plunged into the most desperate adventure with us. It went against me to let him down, but I thought it best.

"Let's go—just a little while. And Kean is to meet us—right ahead here, at the entrance." A Braun went sailing by with a menacing, derisive shout; but father did not notice him. I called to Dan and Freddie; warned them with a significant word and glance. They joined their urging to mine, and father yielded.

We went on. The crowd began pressing around us as we approached the stadium gate. Out of the moonlight Kean came sailing at us; landed lightly beside me. Dan and Freddie crowded up. I whispered: "It's all right, Kean?"

"Yes. They are remove most of the guards to atten' the meeting here. I will get you seated, then go back and see how it is. In half an hour, we will be ready to try it."

Father approached us. "You coming with us, Kean? The Garlands are hostile; I've never seen anything like it. Have you heard from the border?"

"No," said Kean. "Something is wrong. No Brauns have left. There are many, oh, ver' many, around here in Garla to-night—"

Freddie asked: "You seen Graff? Where is he now?"

"Inside," Kean gestured. "On the upper platform leap. The woman Brea is with him—and many Brauns." He whispered aside to me. "Are you guarding Zetta well? When we leave, only the professor will be with her and Hulda, so I order' your insects to come—yes, here is one."

An insect appeared upright at our elbows. Then another. Kean told father he had ordered them. "Good," said father. "Tell them to stay close to Zetta. But we'll be with her anyway."

THE stadium was a great moonlit area on the tree-top surface. A high wall of latticed boards surrounded it. We passed through a gate. Inside, banks of seats swung around a great circle. They were jammed with people—tiers of seats, one above the other, with giant projecting trees serving as uprights to hold them.

The branches, too, were crowded. Upon a thick vine, swinging like a cable across one end, men clung like flies, dark blobs in the moonlight. The seats everywhere seemed built in disorderly array, banked high or low according to the contour of the growing vegetation. At intervals around the outer circumference small jumping platforms were set. They were all black with people.

An oval running track was perched on stilts at one side; another track stood vertically, as though races might be held

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on its inner surface like a squirrel cage. People clustered both structures. There was a single row of flimsy fifty-foot high poles, set upright in a line; ten of them, at intervals of ten feet or so. Gymnasium apparatus. A man clung now to the bending top of each of them.

Upon every point of vantage, people were clinging. The top of the lattice fence, which was at least fifty feet high, held a fringe of young men and girls perched precariously there, laughing. Occasionally one would fall off and come climbing nimbly back.

In the purple moonlight it was a scene of confusion. The audience was assembling, leaping from the gateway, climbing to where space seemed to offer. A man and girl leaped hand in hand. They missed their intended perch and fell a dozen feet in a heap. A great shout of laughter went up.

We entered with our heavy, dragging tread. People craned to see us. A murmur rose. A few girls called to Zetta, or to Hulda. Some shouted derisively. We were in a deep shadow of the gate. In the gloom, father stumbled, fell heavily. A flimsy empty seat broke where he went down; Dan kicked another seat to ffagments as he jumped to pick father up.

"I'm all right, Dan. Thanks." His words were almost drowned in the jeers around us.

"We'll sit here," I whispered to Kean. "Here near the gate. Go ahead now, we'll wait here. Come back as soon as you can."

We took these first empty seats, just inside the gate. Platforms and poles partly obstructed our view; but we could see enough. The rostrum from which Graff was to speak was in clear sight—a platform in the center of the stadium, raised about a hundred feet. A bank of soft lights up there cast a lurid purple glow which did little more than intensify the moonlight. Brauns were crowded up there; among them I could see the towering figures of Graff and Brea.

We sat in a line; father, Hulda and Zetta were at one end, we three conspirators nearer the gate. Behind Zetta, our two insects were lying prone on the surface of a vine. The thought occurred to me then, as it had several times before—these insects were not armed. There were police guards all over the stadium; some seemed to have a single small weapon—it was the only weapon I had ever seen in Garla. I had my dirk in its sheath at my belt; and the Essen automatic in its holster—with the black cloak shrouding them. But I wondered what was the nature of the police guards' weapon.

Zetta was next beside me. In all the turmoil of my thoughts, I was wholly conscious of it. I leaned over her. "Zetta, when he begins talking, you'll have to translate for us."

"Yes," she whispered. Her long white hair lay on the seat between us. In the darkness my fingers found a lock of it and clung. She did not know it—or perhaps she did? I fancied her shoulder bent toward me.

"Peter," she whispered, "be ver' careful what you do to-night—keep out of harm if you can. I did not tell you, I have arrange' with Kean that if you are successful, your father, Hulda and I will meet you out in the open country, where your vehicle can pick us up—"

An abrupt hush had fallen over the audience. The towering figure of Graff had come to the edge of the platform facing us. Some one had turned a light full upon him; he stood etched in the darkness, a lurid purple figure. A hush. He raised his arms; he was smiling benignly as he regarded the sea of upturned faces beneath him. A very kingly scoundrel!

A moment; and then he began to speak. His voice, with its words unintelligible to me, rolled out over the silence. Soft, persuasive, yet powerful. It evidently carried to every far corner of the amphitheater. Sometimes he turned to regard those behind him. Speaking quietly. Then, with a sudden, explosive, thundering statement; then a gentle, persuasive question. All the tricks of the orator! A very kingly scoundrel! He was carrying them.

Applause broke out; his gesture was deprecating as he silenced it. I wondered when Kean would return for us. We could easily slip away from father.

My thoughts were roaming; Kean ought to come shortly. Now was our chance, with most of the guards here at the meeting. Graff was unconsciously playing into our hands—drawing all the guards away from the grotto to hear him talk.

Kean dropped before me! I looked up to meet his white, agitated face. "Peter, don't cry out! Get your father—all of you get out of here!"

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Something was wrong! I recall that I felt a little tug as the lock of Zetta's hair pulled from my fingers. Just a little tug —I forgot it at once, gazing into Kean's horrified face.

"What—" Freddie and Dan were shoving toward us to hear. It made a slight confusion. I repeated, "What—" Half rose to my feet.

A shout stiffened me. It came from a small house by the gate, where officials as the crowd assembled had been directing the seating. A shout from there. An official's voice, bellowing. Accents of horror, and command.

Kean gasped his news: "The Infra-red Control! The crimson and purple globes—they have been stolen!"

The news was already here! The frightened voice from the gate was bellowing it. Graff's voice died away. There was an instant of horrified silence. Kean murmured: "I found the tunnel guards murdered! The controls are gone! These Brauns—"

The amphitheater broke into a pandemonium. Shouts; the thump and rattle of scrambling, panic-stricken Garlands. Figures leaping up. The official voice was bellowing. A police guard near me raised a weapon toward the platform where Graff was standing. But he did not fire. The lights up there were suddenly extinguished. A red glow took their place.

The crimson barrage Graff had used on earth! His Brauns had smuggled it into Garla—they had its apparatus now on the platform. A great circular red curtain enveloped the rostrum up there. From a dozen points about the amphitheater the police guards were firing their short purple stabs of flame at it.

A panic of confusion was around me. A sailing figure—a man trying to leave the stadium—came down and landed full on me. I was knocked sidewise; kicking, trying to disentangle myself from him. We crashed through a seat, and with my weight we fell half my height to a lower level. I got to my feet, fighting the press of frightened people who were shoving me. I could still see Graff's barrage; I could hear its squeals above the pandemonium of shouts.

Up there in the purple moonlight, over the barrage, a black object was descending from the sky. A vehicle? A flying platform—I could not see it clearly. It dropped swiftly down within the barrage circle. In a moment it came sailing up. It passed high over me. A flying platform. The escaping Brauns crowded its rails. The crimson barrage faded out; the rostrum was empty.

Graff's treachery was laid bare. He had stolen the globes of the Infra-red Control!

Without them, Xenephrene in a month or two was doomed. These frightened officials of Garla, these panic-stricken people, all knew it. A world gone mad! But my thoughts were not concerned with that; the cold horror within me sprang from another thought. A realization. Graff had stolen the Infra-red Control to use on earth! My shuddering imagination leaped ahead. A world, our blessed earth, gone mad!

CHAPTER XVI

ON OUR WAY TO CONQUER THE EARTH!

IN THE confusion I found myself pushed a considerable distance, separated from all our party. I could not see any of them; with the scrambling throng, the changing scene I could not at first determine where we had been sitting. Then I saw the place; it was empty. I strove to get there, fighting my way. The amphitheater was fast emptying. The official voice was still bellowing. Guards were leaping away, perhaps rushing to the grotto. In the distance across the city a siren was sounding—a long electrical scream.

I thought, over near the gate through which a press of people were surging, that I saw father. I forced my way in that direction; went through the gate. They ought to be waiting for me here. But they were not.

A cross street ran down at an angle here into the forest vegetation—a narrow, shaky-looking causeway of fiber. It was unlighted, dark with straggling moonlight—a purple, ghostly-looking street. It seemed at the moment empty of people—the throng surged past it, keeping to the upper level.

From behind me as I stood there a dark-cloaked figure darted past me and plunged down it. Dan! It was as tall as he; seemed moving with our earthly heavy tread. I started down after it; I would have shouted, but the words choked me. It was not Dan—not anyone of earth, for all its solid gait! It passed

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through a shaft of moonlight; from the cloak, I saw a white arm hanging. Waving.

This was a man, carrying some one; I caught a glimpse of the bulk of the other body he was holding in his arms, under his cloak. He disappeared down into the purple darkness. Memory of the little tug I had felt in my fingers as Zetta's hair was withdrawn sprang to me now. Was that Zetta under that cloak? Her arm I had seen waving from beneath it?

With the Essen automatic in my hand, I found myself plunging, half falling, down the flimsy street. Beneath the strain of my incautious descent, it bent and crackled. Houses like nests were set here in the dark, pod-laden foliage. They sagged with me as I passed. A woman came to the window of one of them and shouted.

I reached the ground. A vaulted, tunnel-like street was cut through the jungle. Ahead of me, a hundred yards or so, the moonlight showed clear where the jungle ended and the open country began. I thought I saw the hooded figure hurrying out there. I ran—I wondered if I would get a chance to shoot. If that were Zetta he was carrying I would not dare.

I think now I have never been, before or since, so incautious. I came with a rush out of the dark depths of the forest, into an open moonlit area. A red glow hovered like a circular curtain near at hand. Within a dozen steps of me, a small railed platform lay upon the ground. Men were on it. Brauns! A black-hooded figure was standing holding Zetta! Zetta, with fear sweeping her face as she saw me appear.

I must have stood for an instant in confusion. I remember casting off the impediment of my cloak. A dozen men came leaping at me. I fired the Essen, but hit no one. It was knocked from my hand as one of the leaping bodies struck me.

They closed in on me. I turned and swung at them. Flimsy things! My dirk tore into the shoulder of one. He went down with a scream. The dirk had buried, hilt and all; I let it go. I wrenched an arm loose from around my neck; hit another man full in the face. Two others I knocked aside with a sweep of my arm. Another leaped astride my back, but I heaved him off as though he were a child clinging there. They must have been without weapons. They clung, bit and tore at me—a ring of them struggling to hold me.

I burst through them; but, like birds, they were at me again. One I lifted bodily and hurled a dozen feet. Another I caught by his legs, whirling him, a thirty-pound bludgeon to knock the others away. I had almost reached Zetta. I shouted to her—I do not know what. She answered; but it was a scream of warning. I turned too late. Some one from behind crashed a block of metal stone on my head. I went down into soundless, empty darkness.

WHEN I recovered consciousness I was lying on the platform. It was in mid-air; I could feel it sway, feel the rush of the wind past me on that thirty-foot square, railed platform. Some fifteen men crowded near its center, where in a small pit, its anti-gravity, lifting mechanism was installed. It was this pit—a white glow there—which first I saw when I opened my eyes. The glow shone upward upon the faces and figures of the seated men. Brauns. I sat up unsteadily. One of my captors was beside me. He murmured an unintelligible command; but when he saw I only intended to sit up, he relaxed.

The platform was sailing through the purple moonlight. I was too far from the rail to see over it to the ground, but in the distance I could make out a line of the metal mountains—naked crags glistening under the stars.

From behind a platform a yellow fire streamed out, like a vessel's wake; we were being propelled forward by the impulse of its thrust against the air. Vertical and horizontal rudders were back there. In front also, and to the sides, were small lateral wing-rudders.

A gentle hand touched my shoulder. Zetta was seated beside me. Unharmed, her face lighting with relief that I, too, seemed uninjured. My head was roaring from the blow; blood, now drying, matted my hair. But it seemed only a scalp wound.

The man guarding us called to his fellows; two of them came and looked me over, and then went back. The guard moved to seat himself between us and the rail. Zetta and I were left free to talk. She had been seated beside me in the Stadium; when the panic began she had turned to see our two insect guards vanishing under a tiny red beam.

She had leaped up, unnoticed in the

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confusion, and had seen me fall. Hulda was nearest her. She called, but a hand over her mouth stifled it. She was carried off. Her captor had crouched hidden near the gate, with his cloak over them, waiting his chance to get unobserved down the little street. At the forest entrance, when they were about to take her on the platform, I had burst upon them.

This was not the platform upon which Graff and his men had escaped from the amphitheater. "That is much larger," said Zetta. "It is ahead of us now."

"They're taking us to the Braun city?"

"Yes. It is not so much farther. Oh, Peter, you have been lying here like death so ver' long time!"

Zetta's account of her abduction, it suddenly struck me, did not ring wholly true. I eyed her.

"Did you try to escape from the man who seized you in the Stadium?" I demanded.

She understood me at once. She shook her head. "No. Mus' I confess it? I will, Peter. I heard that the controls were stolen—doom for my worl'—perhaps for yours."

She stopped. I said: "So you gave yourself up? Is that it?"

"No. Not jus' that. The man had me—but you ask me frankly if I try to escape. I said no."

"You mean you're glad you're here?"

"Yes," she said solemnly. "In what other way possibly could I help my Garla, or your earth?"

"You think you can help them?"

She shrugged. She was almost unbelievably calm, but I knew it was a pose. "Perhaps. If there is any way I can influence Graff—I am no fool, I will do my best—oh, Peter, not you would I have sacrificed! I did not know you were following—did not know you would be taken—"

"But Zetta, darling—"

"Peter—please!"

She was building a wall up between us! "I am not pledge' to you yet, Peter—"

I thought it best to drop the subject then.

There were many other such small platforms escaping from Garla. They came presently, converging in upon us. We sailed high over the border—a thin, very tall latticed wall stretched over the country to mark it.

Zetta pointed. "The border search-beams are gone. Our guards all dead—it was what Kean feared. These platforms came into Garla unseen—taking back the Brauns and what they have stolen."

The Infra-red control globes! They were on Graff's platform, undoubtedly.

"See!" exclaimed Zetta. "There are the city lights!"

Ahead, a great yellow radiance illumined the sky. The full moon was low to one side of us; to the other, the dawn was coming. Almost soundlessly we swept on. Over a sea of deep purple water, with a barren metal plain beyond it.

The city came up into view. Tremendous metal buildings, set in terraces upon a barren metal rock surface. Fantastic structures, aerial like a giant hive. Spider-web bridges of gleaming metal; giant ladders; metal causeways swinging from cables at heights tremendous. All aerial, spiderlike, fantastically unreal. Glaring with blasts of yellow light; roaring with the noises of industry.

We swept over it at a considerable height and dropped into a broad metalic pit in the plain beyond. A pit two hundred feet deep and several miles across. It was flooded with yellow radiance. Brauns crowded close around us; but I caught glimpses of a great activity. A thousand men at least were busy here. Platforms were landing, like ours from the direction of Garla. A large one was already here.

Zetta and I were pushed to the ground. A dozen or more space-flying globes of various sizes—somewhat similar to the one Dan, Freddie and I had used coming from earth—stood about. At a distance one gigantic affair—a great terraced cylinder with banks of windows like a monster modern steamship—lay on a raised stone platform. Leaders led up to it from the pit-bottom. Our captors shoved us, though not ungently, in that direction.

Graff's expedition to earth! His forces, embarking now! I saw very little of it as with a crowd of Brauns around me I was shoved toward the monster vehicle. The sloping ladders had wide steps one above the other at nearly ten-foot intervals. At a word of command, Zetta bounded up.

They let down a cable, hooked it on me, hauled me up the fifty-foot height. I saw them leading Zetta away. She

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turned toward me, but they forced her on. A Braun abruptly threw a metal hook around me, pinning my arms. I was jerked through a doorway, down a long echoing metal passage and thrown into a metal room, which had a single bull's-eye window. The door slammed upon me. I was left alone.

Within an hour, in the light of my second dawn upon Xenephrene, we left the purple planet on our way to conquer the earth.

CHAPTER XVII

PLANNING THE CONQUEST

"WELL," said Graff, "I had not thought to have you with me, but you are welcome. A pleasure—"

I got to my feet; I had been lying on the bare metal floor. We were well beyond Xenephrene's atmosphere now. And so insistent are the human mundane needs—amid all my perturbed thoughts of the future, my worry over Zetta, my aching head with a miserable gash and lump on it—my chief trouble at the moment was an almost intolerable hunger.

I swayed as I stood up; Graff put out his hand to steady me. "You're not hurt?"

"No. I'm hungry."

"That is good. Zetta said you would be. Well, you shall be fed. Come with me." He stood off, regarding me. I must have been a disheveled enough figure; wide-flaring, corded gray riding trousers, tight over the knee; heavy rolled stockings; a white shirt, open at the throat, torn and with Braun blood upon it; and with my own blood matting my tousled hair.

"You are a strong-looking little fellow," Graff chuckled. "My men, worse luck to them, told me how you fought them. It is my idea—now that you are here with me—you would not run wild like that again. Is it so?"

"Yes," I agreed. Why not? Of what use for me to try to fight, penned up here? I added: "Besides, your men took my weapons."

He was leading me down a long metal passage with closed doors along it at intervals. "Yes. They look interesting—the mechanical one particularly. I mus' get you to explain it to me. Zetta says you will be ver' helpful to me. I think she is right. A clever little girl, Zetta."

His words made my blood run cold! But I kept silent. We entered a wide room, set amidship of the vehicle; through its windows I could see the black firmament on both sides—the great, star-filled void of Space.

Zetta was here, perched on a bench before a high table littered with parchment sheets. She flashed me a smile and a warning glance. Food was on the table near her.

"Your breakfast, Peter," she said calmly. "Sit here."

I ate. Strange meal! Strange food of Xenephrene, but stranger still we three as we sat there. Graff sat pleasantly talking. He seemed in a high good humor; wholly frank and sincere. But I wondered; sometimes I fancied he was gently ironical.

"There were two or three other earthmen besides yourself who came into my hands, Peter. All of them—unfortunately—died. You—I think—may not die. Do you know why? Firs', because Zetta has ask' me to let you live—and I would do anything to please her. That is—almos' anything. Second, because she has promise' me you will help with my campaign. Will you?"

At his brusque question, I hesitated; Zetta's warning glance decided me.

"Yes," I said.

"I mean, really help. I will be able to guess at once you try to fool me. Do not try it, frien' Peter!"

I began: "I don't see how I can help you—"

"He'll help you," Zetta put in.

"Information about your worl'," Graff explained. "There are many things you know, which I do not. Zetta and I have been talking over my plans—I will be the greatest man on your earth, Peter—"

It decided me. A vain glory was his weakness. He wanted to impress Zetta; he seemed even to take pleasure in impressing me. Zetta was playing upon it. We would give him information, authentic enough, which would help him undoubtedly. But we would learn his plans, too. Work with him, as he wished; and once on earth—

I said: "I can see no harm in helping you. Especially if it will benefit me." I smiled shrewdly. "Will it?"

I thought perhaps he swallowed my bait, but I could not be sure. He said emphatically: "If you work with me, I will make you secon' greatest man in your worl'."

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And Zetta? I wondered. I had only an instant alone with her that day. She whispered: "You were perfec', Peter. Work with him—learn what you can. Tell him truthfully what he asks. It is necessary—best in the end."

"But Zetta, you—"

"I can take care of myself. He would not harm me. He wants to make me love him. That, truly, he desired. I am letting him try."

"He won't give up his plans—he'll give up nothing for you—"

"No, of course, not. But I preten' I think maybe he will—move! There he comes! In a few days perhaps he will leave us more alone."

"When we get to earth—"

But she had moved away from me as Graff approached.

WE WERE twelve days reaching earth. Dan, Freddie, and I had made the voyage in eleven days. In this great ship we were traveling faster; but the distance, with Zenephrene drawing away from the earth, was greater now.

It was a monotonous voyage. I was housed alone in a cabin with fairly comfortable furniture. Three times a day, Graff personally came and took me to that larger room where invariably I found my meal waiting me. Of all the rest of the ship—its men, its equipment—I saw nothing.

Zetta very often was in the cabin when I was brought in to my meal. Occasionally I saw the woman Brea. Once, when for a moment Zetta and I were alone, I glanced behind us to see Brea's giant figure lurking in the doorway. Watching us; I caught a glimpse of her face—white, thin-lipped, with eyes that seemed smoldering with fury. There is a menace in the aspect of a man who is a scoundrel; but it is mild and meek indeed compared to the scoundrel woman!

"Zetta, is that Brea ever left near you? Alone with you?"

"No. Oh, no. I watch her."

"She's there now in the pasage doorway."

"Yes. I see her."

"Don't forget. She tried to have you murdered! Does Graff know that?"

"I think so. She would not dare harm me here—he would kill her."

"Don't you be too sure. A woman—a jealous woman—might do anything."

But Zetta only laughed. "Perhaps we may use her, Peter. When we get to earth—" She would not say any more.

Graff was constantly questioning me. The chaos Xenephrene's coming had brought to earth seemed intensely interesting to him. He understood astronomy far better than I did, undoubtedly. We talked of the changed inclination of earth's axis; the changed climate. He questioned me about the different countries—most of them were only names to him. He wanted to know the distribution of the people; the different races; the present great centers of population; the agricultural areas.

"You are ver' helpful, Peter." He seemed to mean it. "It is all quite confusing. So big a worl'—populate' over all its surface. A ver' great conquest for me, Zetta, don't you think so?"

I tried to get information from him. It was not easy. He only wanted to talk generalities, both about earth, and about himself. He had asked me nothing about airplanes or warships—nothing at all about the weapons of war on earth. Except the Essen automatic of mine which he had taken. He laid it on the table before us. I explained it to him; the whole theory of explosives.

"That is mos' interesting." But he did not seem greatly impressed. "I suppose you make these things quite large?"

"Yes," I agreed. And since he asked no more, I volunteered nothing further.

From Graff I learned that there were already on earth several hundred of his men. Hiding, as he put it. They had with them only a very small hand battery with which they could fling around them the crimson barrage. The fellow who had attacked us at Cains', trying to steal the Reet battery, was one of them.

I said: "That crimson barrage—in a larger form—was all you had yourself, when you were on earth before?"

He laughed. "I had other things—it was no time to use them."

"But now—you have other things with you now?"

"Oh, yes, I have other things, Peter."

He had in this expedition some ten thousand men—and nearly a thousand of the Garland insects. And there were several thousand women and children. The Braun race—earth's future ruling race—these were to be the pioneers. They were not all on this vehicle; there were others, equally as large. And several small globes. This vehicle held only the

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main equipment—the scientific apparatus for war. He mentioned flying platforms, more mobile for low-altitude air transportation than this great Space liner; I gathered that they were platforms similar to the one on which Zetta and I had been brought from Garla.

"How are the other Space vehicles going to find you?" I suggested.

"We are leading. I shall pick out an earth base and then signal them where it is. Soon, Peter, before we get to earth, you and I mus' talk some serious details. You will help me pick our earth base—"

I saw then the wisdom of Zetta's plan that we should be in Graff's confidence; here, at least, I could influence him. His landing place on earth; I would urge him as best I could to where he would do earth least damage. Perhaps I might even be able to sway his whole campaign into a channel least damaging to us.

Once I mentioned the Infra-red Control. He shut me up very sharply.

THERE was one time during the voyage when by chance I overheard Graff and Zetta when they thought they were alone. It was Graff in a new light. Amazing scoundrel! I thought at the time—and I still think—that in this one instance at least, every word that he uttered was truthful and sincere.

I could hear and see both him and Zetta plainly. They were in Graff's cabin, where I ate my meals; I was in the length of passageway leading to my room, which now was freely allowed me. I cannot claim I did not try to eavesdrop; for most assuredly I did.

Graff was saying: "If you insis' I talk in English I will do it. For the practice, as you say." Did Zetta know I overheard them? Did she want me thus to realize upon what basis they were? I think so; but I have never known it for a certainty. "And if we are to live on earth, Zetta, it is best. The race which speaks English is greatest on earth. Is it so?"

"I think, yes."

They were sitting by the table; I saw him reach out and touch her arm, saw her involuntarily shrink away.

"Zetta! You hurt me much when you do that."

"I cannot help it, Graff."

He leaned toward her. I could see his face. Sincere—for the moment absolutely sincere.

"You are afraid of me?"

"No, I am not."

"Do not be, Zetta. I love you—I want you to marry me in whatever fashion they use on earth." His voice was impassioned. "Oh, Zetta, what a future there will be for you and me! Cannot you see it? Look ahead! I will be greatest man of this great worl'."

He suddenly stood up before her, drawn to his full height, his great bare arms with the dangling chains extended up before him with a gesture of power. A kingly figure indeed! A white-haired, blue-eyed Viking of old; but there was about him as well, an aspect of modernity—a modern, conquering scientist.

"Look at me, Zetta! A man of whom you will be proud! You—jus' a little girl—to yourself you will say: 'There is my man, greatest in the worl'. I love him.'"

"Ah!" she said. "If I did, Graff."

"You will. I treat you gently." Abruptly he held one of his huge hands before her. "With this hand, I could twist the neck of that Peter."

I doubted it very much!

"I do not do that, because you ask me not to, Zetta."

"And because he will always be of great help to you," she retorted slyly.

He was taken somewhat aback.

"Yes, that is true. But for the other reason also. I try to please you—"

I could see her gaze measuring him. She looked so small, sitting there before him; but I knew that with her keen woman's instinct she was planning how to handle him best.

"You captured me, Graff. Brought me here, by force. When we get to earth, will you let me go?"

"No! I had to bring you—I mus' keep you with me. How else, if you are not with me, can I make you love me?"

She said gently, "Perhaps you go about it wrongly."

"No. I think not. I tried leaving you alone. I was a ver' great man among my Braun people—but you say you have never loved me. It is the love I want—nothing else! You know that! Your love—without that, you are nothing!"

I must admit he said it with regal dignity which to the woman must have been impressive. For just that moment, Zetta's emotion must have been touched. Her hand went impulsively toward him.

"I believe you, Graff. It is why I have no fear of you."

He did not follow his advantage. He

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said, "I am glad. In a few days we will land upon earth. I shall be ver' busy—we will talk no more of this for a long time. But I want you to know—everything I do will be for you."

She said slowly, "If you want to please me, give it up. You have stolen the Red Control. You have doomed your own worl' and mine to disaster. And now you would attack the earth, which never has harmed you. Wait, hear me this time, Graff! Perhaps—if now we were—to turn back—perhaps back on Zenephrene I might find—I loved you—"

He checked her; he was frowning. "You have said that before—do not say it again! I love you—but I am a man—a ruler. You are nothing but a woman. Do you think my love is so unworthy of us that I would let you wreck our destiny? I will not! The man who is mastered by a woman no longer is a man! You would not love me! That is a lie! You will love me as I am, and I am made for great deeds. Enough of this!"

He strode way from her; stopped and turned. "When I am master of the earth we will talk of this again. You say woman's love comes unbidden? Perhaps it does—we will wait then upon its pleasure. But remember this: No woman ever loved a man who was a weakling. I want not that kind of woman's love!"

He strode from the room.

"LET us get to the details," said Graff. My supper was finished; he pushed away the dishes. We were approaching the earth; slowing down now; in another twenty-four or thirty-six hours we would be ready to land. Zetta was seated across the cabin. Graff had drawn two long tables together; a bank of parchment insect lamps was over them with the illumination shaded downward.

Graff added, "Zetta thinks you might be able to draw me a map of your worl'. Could you?"

Geography had been rather my hobby. "I think so," I said readily. "I can draw you one, fairly acurate, on the old Mercator's projection."

"What is that?"

I explained it; the surface spread flat; the lines of latitude and longitude at right angles rather than in a simulation of the globular surface. He nodded.

"That will do all right. Try it now. I will watch you, and you mus' explain as you do it. We mus' pick our landing place and plan the general campaign. Here, Zetta, help us."

He unrolled a white opaque parchment some four feet by six. Zetta fastened it flat to the table. For a pen, I had a metal point in a small handle, with a dangling wire. The point glowed and etched a thin dark line on the parchment. And there was a very serviceable set of drawing instruments—one for measuring angles, the equivalent of a ruler, a compass—and an intricate affair which drew at will every variety of curve—circle, ellipses of every eccentricity, parabola, hyperbola, many other curves which Graff named, but which were unfamiliar to me. And there was a pantagraph—

He explained the uses of these various instruments. "Go ahead," he said.

I took perhaps two hours. It was doubtless a very crude world map I drew from memory. But in its broadest features it was fairly accurate. I laid down the horizontal equator; spaced parallel lines, above it, and below; drew the Greenwich meridian and the others at ten-degree intervals.

There was a time, in my university days, when I knew with fair exactitude the latitude and longitude of most of the world's great cities. I marked them now as dots; and from them, the coast lines grew.

Graff was intensely interested. When I had the main national boundaries sketched in, he stopped me. "That will do us ver' nicely. Show me where the daylight is now."

I calculated. It was now by earth-time, the noon of July 7, 1957; almost exactly mid-spring in the north and mid-autumn in the south. The equator was pointing toward the sun. The days and nights were now about equal at the equator—each some twelve hours long, shading off into twilight at the poles.

"And next month?" said Graff.

"The nights are lengthening in the south. The days are lengthening in the north."

He made me mark it all on the map; the changes of daylight and darkness, and the approximate climate from now until early October, when the North Pole would point to the sun. Then it would be all heat and daylight in the north, shading to equatorial twilight, down to the night and cold of the southern hemisphere.

"My campaign may run until then,"

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he said. "It is these months I am mos' interes' in." He added abruptly, "Where would you advise me to land?"

IT WAS my opening. "That depends on many things—there's a great deal you'll have to tell me, Graff," I said frankly. I smiled. "You can't have a council of war, with your chief councillor wholly ignorant of everything."

"Ver' true, Peter. I will tell you what you want to know." My heart leaped with exultation. I had his confidence at last!

"Our weapons," I said. My first inclusion of myself with him! He took it without notice. "Our weapons. Our method of warfare. What countries we think best to attack first. We'll have the whole world against us, you know."

"I know it."

"Our defense—"

"That is simple, Peter. We have only one, but it is impregnable against anything they have on earth."

"The crimson barrage?"

"Yes."

"Can you lay it over a widespread area? How wide? Graff, is it your idea to capture a great spread of country—devastate it—"

"I cannot," he said. "I can include within the barrage an area that you would call a circle of ten-mile diameter. Four such circles, if I wish to divide my forces. Not much more."

He described how his batteries supplied projectors of the crimson light. It would extend some fifty thousand feet into the air and sidewise some five hundred feet on each side of its source. A projector thus must be set about every thousand feet. He had enough of them to include four ten-mile areas. His storage batteries would last, he said, for continuous use some three months.

"I can stand the barrage up into the air, or tilt it forward, level with the ground—it is then a beam which will annihilate what it touches—"

"With about fifty thousand feet—ten miles—effective range," I finished.

"Exactly so, Peter. But with it in that horizontal position we have a barrage height of only five hundred feet. It is my plan to select a base, in some area not ver' crowded. From there we can move within our barrage over any area of country we wish to take."

"Move how, Graff? On land? Sea?"

"And in the air—over land and sea. We can mount the barrage projectors on our platforms. They will fly; and they will float upon earth's 'water'—I have made sure of that.

We discussed it for another hour. Midnight came; Zetta served us with food and hot drink. Graff was planning to destroy what he could of earth until such time as the leading governments would acknowledge his supremacy.

"I will have them bring all their weapons before me—we will send them into nothingness with our crimson sound. Our Braun weapons then will rule earth indeed! I shall build my city upon your faires' land, and all your nations will pay me tribute. My Garland insects will work for me. The earth people will work for me. Our Braun race will spread—"

His plans after conquest were of a rosy hue. He dwelt on them, while Zetta and I listened in silence.

"Your colony will be small," I said finally. "Your five thousand women—"

"A new race will come on earth. The blending of the two worl's."

"Won't you bring more of your people from Zenephrene?"

Zetta said suddenly, "Xenephrene is doomed."

Graff frowned at her. "That was necessary, Peter. Ver' unfortunate. No. We who have left, plan not to return. Nor send for others—the best of us are here. Zetta is a silly child—silly with woman sentiment. Why should we bother with Xenephrene? A ver' small worl', so little of it habitable. I was master there—"

He had not been master, save of his small minority, themselves in subjection. "—But it was not big enough for me. I have lef' it to its destiny."

Left it to its fate—its doom! But I only smiled. "We must decide where we are to land upon earth," I suggested. "Do you want the daylight or darkness?"

He ran his finger along the line of the equator. "Here. In the equal days and nights. It will be warm?"

"Yes."

"That I want. How warm?"

"Like Garla. Warmer probably."

He nodded. "And from there, I will go north, following the warmth and daylight. What is here, Peter?"

HIS finger was on the equator in South America. My heart quickened. Our new great cities of the Western World

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were springing up, there in Ecuador, Venezuela, the Guianas, northern Brazil. This area was thronged now with colonists. They were planning, at the Falls of the Iguazu, to supply light and heat through all the Americas. Vast industrial plants were planned for these new cities. It would be the industrial and mining center of our western hemisphere. He must not land there!

"It used to be jungle," I said casually. "And small rather backward nations. Down there in Bolivia and Peru—all the equatorial Andes region—there were great mining possibilities, largely undeveloped. It has changed a little now."

I led his interest elsewhere. The East Indies, where my great Dutch Islands were thriving now with a new activity, drew his attention. But I distracted him. We determined at last upon the plains north of Mombassa, in British East Africa. A fair land with the new climate, but as yet not densely settled, except to the north and north-west.

In the north were Abyssinia and the Egyptian Sudan—the great valley of the Nile. To the northwest, the Libyan and Saharan deserts. These were springing into fertile, temperate areas. The governments of Great Britain, France and Spain were locating down there. But I felt I could keep Graff away from this region. Graff would want to move north. I would make him move northeast—up the African coast, over Eastern Abyssinia and get him across the Gulf of Aden, into Arabia, Persia and thence to the sparsely settled, still barren lands of the Central Asian Socialists.

"What about your food supplies?" I demanded. "You can't maintain your people very long with what you've brought, can you?"

"No," he said. "But I will get food from the country we capture. You must show me where at this season the agriculture is under way. Perhaps, too, you have some large gov'ment storehouse now which I could seize."

He listened carefully as I pointed out the route into Socialist mid-Asia. "What we want," I said, "is to frighten the world—bring it to our feet. Not to devastate it completely, with nothing to rule afterward but a chaos. You must be careful, Graff, as future emperor, not to wreck the food supply of your new domain. It's precarious at best now."

"I understan'," he said gravely.

"You are right in that, Peter. We will bring them to yield—ver' quickly, I hope. Tell me in detail what they will use as weapons against us."

He seemed tireless. For another hour or two, I explained as best I could the armament of the great nations. It was all chaotic since the Great Change. Indeed, I was sure of very little I said. Most of the world capitals had moved; all the races and centers of population had shifted. Nations were disintegrating, blending as their people moved in wholesale flight to new areas.

In a few years most of the world would be united almost like one big family. There had been no thought, since the Great Change, of maintaining national armaments. The worst possible time to have an invader from another planet attack us! But this latter, I did not explain to Graff.

Still another hour. "Graff," I said abruptly. "You never mention the Infrared Control. What part will it play?"

I expected he might frown his displeasure. He did not. He met me with an imperturbable smile. "You are tired, Peter," he said calmly. It was nearly dawn; Zetta had been listening to me silently, but keenly aware of my motives. But she, too, now was tired. She flashed me a warning look when I mentioned the Control.

Graff's slow smile continued. "Peter, you go to your cabin. I will work this out."

I slept. It must have been noon when I was awakened, not by Graff, but by a Braun I had never seen before. In Graff's cabin my meal was waiting. Zetta was not there. Graff was still poring over my map; I think he had not left it.

"Sit down, Peter."

When I was fairly eating, he gestured at the map. "I have made my decision. We will land in north Brazil. I will also sen' a force to Central Africa. It can move north over the Sahara grain fields, into Europe. And from Brazil we can move north and south. I think that North and South Americas and Europe and Africa are mos' important places to attack, Peter. We will frighten them, if we attack them there!"

Irony was in his voice and in his smile! And I had thought to influence this fellow!

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE EARTH AT BAY!

HISTORY will record that the forces of Graff, the Xenephrene, landed upon earth at 2 A.M., July 9, 1957, in north Brazil, at one degree fourteen minutes north latitude, and sixty-one degrees twenty-two minutes west longitude. There was no one person on earth who saw more than a fragment of what followed during those frightful weeks; out of a myriad accounts, history will piece a pallid, dispassionate vision of the whole.

For myself, I witnessed many horrible things. But only fragments—as an ant with its tiny viewpoint sees the forest through which it crawls, and might futilely try to describe it. I can only name facts; imagination must supply the rest, and even then inevitably fall far short of the grim, tragic reality.

I was crouching with Graff and Zetta at a floor window of the giant Space liner when, that July 9, we slowly settled to within a thousand feet of the ground. A dark, tropic, overcast night.

From beneath our bow a crimson, howling radiance, one of the barrage projectors, sprang downward. There was no one left alive over the ten-mile circular area around which our barrage was flung that night, to tell what happened. I saw the houses of this newly-settled agricultural area melt and vanish as we swept them with the radiance.

The barrage went up. By dawn, all the country near us was deserted of its people, who fled in terror as far away from us as they could get. The tropic jungle had wilted since the Great Change. The land here was cleared; broad, fertile fields, planted now with grain, corn, and garden produce. Prosperous farms, crowded with settlers in their small, new houses. New villages. Several small cities. Over a hundred mile area they were deserted in a day.

Graff's other vehicles arrived. One was dispatched to Africa. It landed in the French Sudan, in latitude fifteen degrees five minutes north and longitude three degrees nineteen minutes west—not far south of the city of Timbuktu, which had tripled in size and importance since the Great Change. The red barrage was flung up here, but it was on the flying platforms. Within a day it began moving directly north.

Around our encampment in north Brazil, the barrage projectors were mounted on the ground for a permanent stay. A ten-mile circle. It included a stream. I found Graff had apparatus for distilling the water, for drinking supply. He foraged out for food, even though he had a three months' supply with him. He began building dwelling houses for his women and children—using materials he had brought, and materials his insects dragged in from neighboring, abandoned villages.

An incredible activity. By the end of July his permanent base was well established. We had been attacked. I can only hint at the surprise, the panic, our landing caused all over the world. Since the Great Change, the last thing that had been thought of was war.

The nations were concerned with their bare existence—the welfare of their people. War between them was an impossibility. The great battle fleets of Britain, the United States, France and Japan were no longer armed for combat. Most of the vessels had been dismantled of their armament, converted into transports, for the people in distress and for the transportation of food.

Armies were organized now as government industrial and agricultural workers. Every government was in the business of producing, buying, storing, and selling food. The war airplanes were used for transportation; thousands of the great Arctic A type were in commission—but few of them were armed.

The world was wholly unprepared and unequipped for war. Nevertheless, Graff's base in north Brazil was attacked. Railroad lines were near us. They were abandoned to traffic within fifty miles of us. But an armored train was run up in the night. It shelled us with a long-range gun. One of Graff's foraging parties outside the barrage was struck and most of its members killed. But the screaming shells—they came all one night at twenty minute intervals—exploded harmlessly against our barrage.

A few planes came up cautiously to inspect us. One must have risen over the ten mile height of our barrage. It dropped bombs. One of them fell within our lines. It killed a dozen men and working insects, and wrecked some of our apparatus; it barely missed our group of vehicles, lying on the river bank in the center of our encampments. I doubt if

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that aviator ever knew how true was his aim of that one bomb.

The train with its thirty-mile range gun was gone at dawn. But it came again the next night. I went with Graff, aloft on a small platform, high over our lines. Through the red glow of our barrage we could see the train in the distance—a blur of moving lights. We carried a single small projector. At dawn we sailed out, through a momentary break in the barrage. The train saw us coming. It retreated, swinging and swaying over its rails at an eighty-mile-an-hour gait. It was a Garga locomotive, and a flat car. Puffing, snorting, careening through the country to avoid us. But we caught it. There was nothing there in a moment but a tumbled heap of its heavier steel parts. We sailed back.

THE world during these days must have been frantically assembling its armament. Our Brazil base continued to be harassed. By July 15, our river quite suddenly went dry. We found that some fifty miles up the course on a distant rise of ground they had mounted a queerly-fashioned projector. It might have been from Zenephrene itself!

It was Freddie's heat-projector, sent here from Miami by the United States government. It had an effective range of some two miles, and its heat—they must have been applying it continuously for several days—had dried up the small water-course, sending it up in clouds of steam.

Graff ordered an attacking platform out. It never returned. Miraculously, a long-range gun must have hit it. Then we found that, still farther up, they were damming our stream. Graff let them alone. We sent out foraging parties at intervals for water. They were frequently attacked.

From Zetta, I sometimes had translated accounts of these hand-to-hand engagements. Graff had a variety of small hand weapons with which his foraging men were generally armed. Hand batteries of the purple Reet-current. They shot very short, purple stabs of flame. I recalled seeing the guards use them that night in the Garla Stadium.

There were hand knives, not unlike the Spanish machete. And occasionally Graff used a lethal gas. It clung its weight close to the ground. The wind would sometimes sweep it over a village.

The small purple flame projectors interested me particularly. I persuaded Graff to show me one. The crimson barrage was a form of Reet; so was this purple light. The one a low vibration rate; the other, a high. Both, of course, were akin to the Control globes. I tried again to mention the Control, but Graff shut me up. He was not using it, as yet. I found out soon afterward that, by every artifice in her power, Zetta was holding him back.

But he explained the purple flame. It stabbed into the crimson barrage, neutralized it. With one of these small projectors, a man at a distance of ten feet or so could stab a small hole through our red radiance. Graff used this small hand projector to blind the earthmen at short range, and to explode their gunpowder weapons in their hands—both of which it evidently did with great efficacy.

I said casually: "The Garlands had these purple projectors?"

"Of course, Peter."

"And, Graff, why couldn't that be made in a larger form? A giant purple beam?"

"It could. The Garlands have it."

My thoughts were running tumultuously. Father, Dan, and Freddie were up there in Garla. I said, still casually: "Then the Garlands could have penetrated our barrage—neutralized it?"

He smiled lugubriously. "Yes. That is what they did to me when I attack' them years ago."

Graff was in a good mood this day. He showed me some of the defensive apparatus he had brought along. "I do not need it here, Peter. But I have it, jus' the same."

Insulated garments which one might wear and be protected, at least partially, from the red barrage. Infra-red goggles to protect the sight; ear grids to bar out the sound—to raise it again to the normal vibration to which our human ears are accustomed.

"Why," I said, "with these one might walk through our barrage!"

"Yes," he agreed, "I should not care to try it—but one might get through safely."

He put them away.

WE HAD no reports from Africa. But it was over there that in these early days the greatest damage to earth was done. The flying ring of platforms, with the vehicle in their midst, had immediately begun moving northward.

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Slowly some two or three hundred miles a day, but inexorably, impervious to every attack that could be sent against them, they blazed a ten-mile twisting trail, northward across Africa—a trail of queerly blank, dead-gray surface of empty earth.

It was as though some giant finger of death were dragging, trailing itself over the continent. It cut a swath through Timbuktu, trailed over the newly settled, newly fertile Sahara, swung east over the mountains into the erstwhile Libyan desert; then north over the Mediterranean. It was there by July 20.

A fleet of warships, hastily assembled from every nation, was in the Mediterranean. The red enemy flew high. Its barrage was downward. The ships, at a fair distance, withstood the red glow. Especially at night. The world was learning the nature of this gruesome enemy.

The crimson screaming radiance seemed more deadly, more uncanny in the darkness of night. But it was not. Our sunlight was favorable to it; by day its range was greatly increased. Graff knew it. He had told me he would follow the daylight northward!

The great steel ships in the Mediterranean—if they kept off several miles—were safe, especially at night. Safe from annihilation! But on them must have been queer, uncanny scenes!

One, just south of Malta, was caught in a fringe of outflung red beam. Those on board have told what for a minute or two they went through. It was night. The ship's lights went out. Its dynamos were burned. There were several explosions aboard. But the ship escaped. Its men were half deafened; eyes red, smarting and strained; a queer irritation of the skin. And many were laughing with an hysteria which no one could explain.

The invaders turned east from Malta. They were never unduly aggressive, the barrage generally was closely held for defense—save that over the land it blighted always that ten-mile swath. They passed over the isles of Greece and again turned north. Heading up into mid-Europe. Before them—as well as their course could be guessed for it always was erratic—the country was deserted. A rout, with occasionally an old fortress, or a group of armed earth planes, or a railroad line with an armored train, making a brief, futile stand.

During this period the few Brauns whom Graff had sent previously to earth now began to make their appearance. A few, scattered individuals; they were found in various localities, and by the earth people summarily killed. In mid-Europe a group of them—a hundred or more—suddenly appeared and made a stand. Graff's expedition rescued them, took them aboard the flying platforms. They were the last, I think, of the scattered Xenephrenes; no others ever appeared, anywhere on earth.

The last week in July saw us spreading out in South America. Our permanent camp housed the women, children and the older men. They maintained the barrage. The insects were working with the men building the town.

With a ring of flying platforms, we made a sortie north. A week up and back. We laid waste a swath through central Venezuela to the coast; we returned with a western swing, through Colombia, Ecuador, north Peru and back to our base. By July 30 it was evident that the earth people were doing their best to evacuate all the territory inclosed by the circle we had cut. Graff saw it; a new idea gripped him.

"We can patrol it, Peter. With a few platforms I can hold this territory—and spread farther."

It was an area roughly from five degrees south to seventeen degrees north latitude, and from sixty degrees to seventy-eight degrees west longitude. A small Space-flying globe was now dispatched with a message to the east. It joined Graff's other force in mid-Europe. Together they moved in one leap to the Orient, landed in Java, and began sweeping the East Indies. They attacked the rich Dutch islands near the equator, which with the new climate we Dutch had proudly thought would become the fairest places of the earth.

From an island there was no swift escape for the multitudes of panic-stricken people—I have read that they flung themselves into the sea by thousands.

I have seen the great Javan temples, which in the 1940's before the Great Change, we Dutch were using as a lure for the tourist trade—seen them in ruins as they looked when the Xenephrenes had passed. They say that the Banda Sea, in August, reeked with the bodies floating in it.

Fair, green islands, metamorphosed

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from the tropic to a temperate zone, were laid waste without a living human remaining. From twenty degrees north to twenty degrees south—down into the best land of the Australian continent, up beyond the Philippines—the East was devastated.

Graff's plan was to drive the world's people away from the equator. There was only mid-Africa left, and his force now went back there.

"WE'LL see," said Graff. "Perhaps—long ago, who knows, they are willing to yield. You can go with me, Peter. We will deliver them a message and see what they have to say."

It was the first week in August. We took a small Space-flying globe. Just Graff and I, with three or four of his men to handle it. Then Zetta wanted to go. Graff agreed. He was always pleased to have her with him; his vanity was pleased that she should see his triumphs.

I think, too, that he would not have cared to leave her in the camp with Brea. The woman was a snake-like menace. Graff seemed contemptuous of her. He told me once he had promised long before, to marry her, but had since decided it was not to his liking.

We started in the globe, and sailing high, watchful that no airplane could get up to attack us, we went to Miami. At a twenty-mile height, we waited for nightfall. The nights were brief now in this northern latitude. We had prepared a small metal cylinder. I wrote the message to go in it.

"To the governments of the earth, from Graff, the Xenephrene."

We told them that if they wished to yield, we would name our terms, and give directions for the destroying of all their armament. One condition of surrender we named now, in advance.

From ten degrees north to ten degrees south latitude, all the land in the world was permanently to be evacuated—to be held by the Xenephrenes.

Graff, with his fifteen or eighteen thousand people, could not possibly be expected to use or need more than a fraction of this land area, as I had pointed out to him. But he had great, if somewhat nebulous, colonization plans. Earth men and women from several different earth races chosen by him, were to be sent, to be selected and judged by him as the old Eugenic sect once thought to judge the applicants for future parenthood.

A hundred thousand such earth people would come and swear allegiance to his ruling government. With his Brauns they would build new cities; populate this most benign central region of earth; build their new and greater civilization—breed their new race, the best of the two worlds.

We directed the Miami authorities that if this message were received, they should notify us by a swaying white searchlight beam from Miami Beach the following night. We would then wait another two nights. Then, the night of August 7, if the beam showed again, swaying, we would know they desired to yield. But if it stood straight up into the sky, motionless, we would understand they still defied us. We made no threats—our deeds, not our words, would speak for us.

We dropped the cylinder into the outskirts of Miami. It went down, flaming like a beacon from the blazing gas we had ignited in its top. It fell, as close as I could judge, near the Greater Miami—Fort Lauderdale line. By daylight we hung fifty miles high, waiting.

I HAVE been told, and I can fairly imagine, the scene at the conference which was held in the Miami War Department during those three following long days with the brief nights between them.

At this daylight season there was a freight and passenger air line flying from Miami to the Canaries, with connections at the Canaries for the recently established capitals of Great Britain and France, near the Barbary Coast.

Upon one of these liners representatives of all the European governments came hastily to assemble at Miami; from Japan came leaders of the Oriental powers; and from Caracas—greatest capital now of Latin America—came the newly elected President of the Pan American Union.

Graff and I, in our devastating swing up through Venezuela late in July, had passed not far west of Caracas; those had been anxious moments for me.

I need not picture that grave, solemn conference of the World Powers in Miami that August 6. I understand it lasted without intermission for some thirty-six hours. They had determined to yield.

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With my gloved hands I ripped at the wires of the diabolical crimson globe; and I kicked with passionate fury at the instrument of destruction

A giant searchlight was erected at Miami Beach. It swayed its answer that the cylinder had been found—that Graff's message was being considered. We saw it. We hung far, inaccessibly far alôft, waiting for the decision.

The night of August 7 came. The conference was ending. The definite decision to yield had been reached. From the War Department a telephone was connected with the little house at the beach where the operator was ready to flash the signal. Our War Secretary rose to his feet.

"Shall I phone him now, gentlemen?" They say his voice nearly broke.

There was a silent assent. From the adjoining room a telephone rang sharply; then another. A confusion in there. Telephones ringing, and the government radio sounding a peremptory incoming call. A confusion, while the War Secretary stood irresolute. Then an Under Secretary burst into the room. "A globe from Space has landed in the Everglades!"

A few moments, and from a dozen sources came the details. Professor Vanderstuyft had arrived from Xenephrene! With his daughter, and Daniel Cain, Frederick Smith—and a young man, a Xenephrene friendly to earth—named Kean. They had weapons with them with which to fight this invader!

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They were no more than fifty miles from Miami, and were being rushed to the conference by a government Arctic A.

WE WERE crouching over the floor of our hovering globe, gazing down at the shadowy outlines of the Florida coast. The twilight of August 7 deepened into night. No searchlight beam showed. We waited. We did not see father's globe come down: I did not know anything about it until afterward.

The hours passed. "They will yield," said Graff confidently. "They postpone now the humiliating hour. But before the dawn we will see their searchlight beam. It will waver, tremble—jus' as in their own hearts they are wavering and trembling."

And Zetta and I thought so, too. The short night passed; the twilight of dawn began showing. And then the white beam from down there sprang up. It stood vertical. Motionless!

For a moment we stared at it, almost unbelieving. Moisture clouded my sight of it; my brave world, firmly shining its defiance!

Graff sprang to his feet. "Why! Incredible! They have not yielded?"

Anger contorted his face—chagrin was in his voice. I think he felt the chagrin more strongly from Zetta's presence.

"So they will not yield? The worse for them! You shall see now the Red Control, Peter!"

"No!" burst out Zetta. "You mus' not do that, Graff!"

His laugh was grim.

"You shall see! The Red Control—I will loose it now upon them!"

CHAPTER XIX

RED MADNESS STALKING THE EARTH

DAYS of grim activity in Graff's camp followed. I think Graff had no intimation of the reason for the earth's defiance; he seemed to feel that our governments were fool-hardy, stupid—stubborn beyond the point of human reason. He had been in a towering rage, but that passed. He moved about his tasks now with a cool, careful efficiency. But I could see a certain almost awed grimness about him for the diabolical nature of this thing he was doing.

His mood was reflected in all his men. And they changed toward me. Never more than contemptuously tolerant, they were now openly hostile. Gibing at me, the earthman.

I was passing one morning down the line of flimsy houses which was the main street of the camp. A woman leaped from a doorway and struck me in the face. My guard was at hand. Graff never let me move anywhere without an armed man to watch me. He said to protect me, especially from the giant insects which lurked about the camp, and which, in truth, I always feared; but I knew Graff's motive was to watch that I did not try to escape. The woman struck and reviled me until my guard pulled her away.

Graff had sent a globe at once to Africa, to order back his force operating there. It came in, crowding our camp. Near the north line of our barrage Graff built a small stone house. Within it the control globes were being erected. He would never let me or Zetta near it.

The barrage throughout its entire circumference was strengthened. All our projectors were in use, triple-banked in some places. Graff had built a chemical laboratory in the camp. His scientists had for weeks been working in it, endeavoring to produce the Reet current on earth for a renewal of the storage tanks which had been brought from Xenephrene. I was now barred from this building; they were working in it on the Control-globe mechanisms.

Above our camp a flying patform now constantly hovered at a ten-thousand foot altitude. It spread a thin, red barrage like a ceiling above us. Graff anticipated that he would be attacked more vigorously than ever before;he said so to me once, with his sardonic smile—and he had not forgotten that one aviator who had dropped a bomb upon us.

By August 14 our force had returned from Africa, our lines about our base were strengthened, the Control-globes were erected in the little house, and everything was ready. About the camp, and at intervals five miles out to the barrage line, small projectors the size of a man's hand had been erected; wires in conduits ran from them back to the laboratory. There must have been fifty or more.

On the afternoon of August 14 a current was turned into them. They hummed gently; when the twilight and night came, I saw them emitting a faint purple radiance. Within an hour it hung

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over the camp—over all the inside area of the barrage—like a purple haze. The haze I had seen in the air of Xenephrene. It was to protect us here, in our enclosed area, from the effects of this thing we were about to broadcast over the earth!

A week from that night over Miami when we were defied—and now Graff was ready. An anxious week for me. A thousand times I had thought of a thousand vague plans of something desperate I might do. But what? I was more closely guarded than ever before. A very psuedo-liberty was all that was permitted me.

Zetta, in a few snatches of talk I had alone with her, still seemed to think she might persuade Graff to stop. Futile hope! Her brave endeavors had from the first been futile. At last, she seemed convinced.

A wariness of manner, an alert, calculating look whenever she was with Graff, came upon her. I can only guess now, what thoughts and plans were behind that grim, masklike little face. She said nothing of her thoughts to me; there seemed suddenly an added estrangement between us.

During the evening of August 14, while I was watching the purple haze, Graff sought me. Zetta was near him.

"We are ready, Peter. I thought that you and Zetta would like to see these little globes that are so powerful to triumph for us."

"Walk out to the Control house?"

"Yes. I am going now to turn the current into the Red Globe."

I strove not to show my emotion; I thought he might dismiss my guard—and he, Zetta and I might take the walk alone. If I could watch my chance and spring upon him.

But he bade the guard follow close behind us. It was a dark, overcast night. Our little town by the dried river bank was almost in the center of the circular barrage lines. From here it was some five miles to the north of the barrage.

WE WALKED over the slightly undulating dead-gray waste of what had been the Brazilian farm country. The ground was covered with a gray dust, like burned powder. Graff and Zetta and my guard could have leaped over the distance in a few minutes. Graff was impatient, contemptuous of my slow progress. He forced me forward at a trot.

We passed the occasional towers he had built; a few sailing platforms on the summits of the slopes. The purple projectors standing on the ground at intervals were all humming, casting up their purple haze into the still night air.

Ahead of us loomed the red curtain of the barrage. The night now was filled with its howl. A Braun appeared from the darkness—one of the interior ground guards. His white, half-naked body, with bullet head of clipped white hair, was edged, lurid with the reflected crimson glow. Goggles were on his eyes—thick glass cones projecting out grotesquely; his ears were muffled with small wire grids. He spoke to Graff, and stood deferentially aside to let us pass.

The stone house was set close behind the barrage, bathed in the crimson—a small, one-storied house with a single door and no windows. At the door two guards stopped us. My personal guards waited outside. The room we entered was tiny, with one small white light. Evidently the sleeping room of these two interior guards. They wore goggles and ear-grids, and tight trousers and smock of black; insulating fabric; a cap with a black mask, now raised; and black gloves. Here, near the broadcasting of the Infra-red Control, exposed to its nearness over a long period, the men needed utter protection. A rack on the wall held other similar protecting garments, masks, goggles and ear-grids. "We will not need them," said Graff. "We will be here but a moment. Jus' a moment—but long enough!"

The room had one interior doorway—a small, round opening with a heavy bull's-eye door. We stooped to pass through; emerging into a low, black-vaulted room. On a small railed platform stood the two little globes. Another man was here, robed in the tight-fitting black garments; gloved, masked and goggled. Grotesque executioner! He murmured to Graff, and stood aside.

There was a tense moment. The room was dim, and dead silent. No windows. No opening save the round doorway into the room through which we had entered.

Graff said slowly: "We will give them a few hours of the Red vibrations—tonight and to-morrow perhaps, and then broadcast from the purple globe—restore normality." He added grimly: "We will see then what they say, Peter."

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The two globes were white, opaque and silent. Graff turned to a switch. For the first time that evening Zetta spoke; an involuntary cry of protest.

"No! Graff—no!" She gripped him, but he thrust her roughly aside. I was tense; I think then I was about to leap upon Graff. But from the hand of the black-robed man a weapon was pointing quietly, menacingly at me.

Graff's face was grimly inscrutable. He reached up suddenly and threw the switch. The dim light from somewhere in the room faded and vanished. A crimson glow from one of the globes took its place; the other globe stood milk-white, silent, alert.

A humming. From the grid over the active globe a faint red beam was streaming. It spread; it deepened; it streamed out through the solid black wall of the room. I stared after it. Sidewise—upward; I seemed to be gazing out into a black illimitable distance, red-tinted. Long unearthly vibrations, broadcast now around our world! They were already around and back again and starting anew.

"Come," said Graff's voice abruptly. "That's all."

The black-masked operator was seated at his little table, watching his dials. The red globe had settled to its steady hum as we left the room. Strangely brief, undramatic scene! I sensed that Graff had made it so—a cloak to hide what emotions sweeping him, only he would ever know. A matter-of-fact casualness.

Yet I have never witnessed a scene of such potential horror. A small stone house, black-vaulted room with its lone, black-garbed man. Just a single small globe, faintly humming, glowing crimson. But I knew that within a day or so our great earth would be at its mercy!

Back on Xenephrene, in Garla that evening at the Stadium, there had followed a night of confusion. With the Infra-red Control stolen, the Garlands were in a panic. The frightened people had rushed for the grottos; by the time the authorities were able to bring order, the night had passed. At dawn, pursuit had started for the Braun city. Too late. Graff's expedition had left for earth. The Brauns remaining on Xenephrene learned now their leader's duplicity. They, too, were stricken with fear and horror.

There is an old saying on earth, "When the devil is sick, the devil a monk would be!" The Garland authorities were very ready to listen to father now! They sent at once for him and Dan and Freddie. They begged his advice; there was nothing they would not do to help him, if only he could suggest a way to get back the Control.

Their scientists had spent years refining by slow process the vital elements necessary to its construction. The work had started when Xenephrene came within the first faint rays of our sunlight. There was no time now to repeat that process. Unless they could remove the Control, within a few months, at most, they were doomed.

THEY had been truthful in telling father that there was no interplanetary vehicle ready in Garla. And Graff had left none in his Braun city. There was only the small vehicle in which Dan, Freddie and I had arrived. It was decided that father and his earth people were to return in this globe to earth at once, taking Kean with them. Kean could be taught by father how to navigate the vehicle. If on earth the Control were recovered from Graff, Kean would bring it back to Garla.

They waited about a week, gathering weapons and equipment with which to fight Graff on earth.

The globe was too small to take very much. They brought to earth four giant projectors of the purple ray with which to stab neutral openings in Graff's barrage; a projector of the crimson barrage itself; and the insulating equipment for some four hundred persons—black-hooded suits, masks, gloves, Infra-red goggles and ear-grids.

It seemed very little, but the best that could be done. The Garlands promised to rush another vehicle to earth with other weapons. But the vehicle would be some weeks yet in construction, and the distance between the worlds was daily lengthening.

It was, even now, a long voyage for father's party. They arrived—dropped into the Everglades on the evening of August 7—as I have told. Father, at the conference, would have none of the idea of surrender. And the delegates from the World Powers, heartened with the weapons now at hand, with Freddie and Dan vigorously stating that they knew how to use them—reversed their decision. The

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searchlight beam held steady with its defiance.

Both Dan and Freddie have since told me how forcefully father spoke in Miami that night. On Xenephrene an ineffectiveness had seemed to be upon him. I had noticed it. A strange world, among strange people where he had lived and worried all those months, had beaten him down. He had seemed years older; an almost querulous, ineffectual old man.

Subconsciously realizing this, Dan, Freddie and I had discarded him from all our planning. But back on earth, among his own people, his own environment, his forceful character returned.

He told them, that night at the conference, about the Control. It was disturbing news. But Graff obviously had not used the Control as yet. Perhaps on earth it would not operate.

There was much to do before Graff could be seriously attacked. Four Arctic A warplanes were to be equipped with the four purple ray projectors. They were to be armed with long-range Essen-Bloc guns. These guns, developed in the early fifties, just before the Great Change, were for aircraft use in war.

They fired a peculiarly destructive shell which, it was thought, would be most effective against the light Xenephrene structures—Graff's Space-vehicles and his flying platforms. There also was the crimson barrage projector to be assembled and mounted. And a fighting force of some two hundred planes, whose pilots and gunners were all to be black-garbed and goggled.

It would take a week or two for these preparations. The attack would be made against Graff's Brazilian base; it was found now that his mid-African force had withdrawn and returned to Brazil. All the Xenephrenes were concentrated there; it was exactly what the earth leaders most desired.

There was a week of complete inactivity from Graff. Scouting planes, ordered not to approach too close, reported that his barrage seemed deepening in color and sound; and he had placed a red radiance overhead. His inactivity seemed threatening to the Miami authorities. All the earth preparations were going hurriedly forward in Miami.

It seemed an ominous lull, while both sides were preparing. Graff, it was hoped, did not know what the earth was planning. He would be taken completely by surprise. One great surprise rush, by night. They believed in Miami that they would be ready by about August 20.

The world publics waited, expectant. The news of the arrival of weapons from Garla was hushed and suppressed lest by some chance it get to Graff. The world public was fed with radio propaganda; the invaders had withdrawn from Africa because they feared the earth's attack; they were concentrated in Brazil—their power to harm earth was lessening; soon the earth forces would fall upon them; destroy them. Or perhaps even now, the Xenephrenes were planning to withdraw from earth, as they had before.

Upon such opiate as this the public was fed. It is always so in times of war! Newspapers printed pages of learned technical explanation of what would happen, by all the laws of mathematics and logic, when once the world powers went into battle. Newspaper experts analyzed the scientific facts from every angle, reaching always the same triumphant solution—experts who knew no more of the real facts than did their readers. And the public waited expectant.

Freddie and Dan, chafing at their forced inactivity, persuaded the Miami authorities to let them try Freddie's heat ray, in advance of the main earth attack. It was Freddie's plan, and father also agreed to its merit. Graff would be suspicious at this long silence from his enemy—just as Miami was daily growing more suspicious of him.

Freddie's projector could create, with a two-mile range, a heat of some three hundred degrees Fahrenheit; it had a three-mile range, if the heat were concentrated to a six-foot striking area. Graff's barrage was vertical. Its horizontal area of danger was no more than five or six hundred feet.

In a muffled, unlighted plane, selecting a dark night, Freddie and Dan could get within a few miles of the barrage; the heat might wreck some of the barrage mechanism. There was no one to say whether these heat vibrations would penetrate the crimson glow or not. It had never been tried. And at least it would create a diversion which Graff would think a normal earth attack. He would expect none other for a time.

Freddie and Dan planned to start on the night of August 15. By evening of August 14 they were in the Miami War

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Department, receiving last admonitions. The official radio was droning its routine messages.

THERE was a sudden interference. A chaos of weird voices such as only the radio—particularly in the old pioneer days—could produce. The interference grew worse; then the radio went dead. The telegraphs, telephones and undersea cables all had sudden interference, but they kept in operation. The new "Invisible light-beam" phones, as they were popularly called, withstood it, but service was maintained under difficulty. The electric lights went dim, almost out; then brightened suddenly; and dimmed again.

This, all within a few minutes, that evening of August 14. In Miami, and all over the world it was the same. And then, almost unnoticed at first, slowly, insidiously, inexorably, the reign of the Red Madness began. The great mass of people throughout the world did not understand it, had no idea what was happening to them. They called it, they still call it, the Red Madness.

It began with a feeling of uneasiness. An oppression. The feeling one has sometimes when the barometer falls in the lull before a coming storm; the feel, as they would say, of electricity in the air. Thousands said that, undoubtedly. A growing uneasiness. The countries in the daylight felt it most.

The sick, the weak, the nervous, were most quickly affected. In hospitals there was a sudden hysteria among the patients. In a Miami hospital early that evening an old woman patient ran screaming and laughing, screaming that red demons were after her. Perhaps, of all the millions, she was the first.

She leaped into the street; Freddie and Dan recall her shuddering scream and eerie laughter as it floated into the open windows of the War Department.

At the War Department the reports from abroad were increasingly alarming Within an hour every official channel of communication was cluttered with news. A diversity impossible to picture! At first, abnormality in the sick, the old, and the very young. Infants wailing, unable to sleep; old people stricken with hysteria, a morbid, weeping melancholia, or a wild frenzy of madness.

A lone old man suddenly gone mad; then, not only old people—a mob rushing screaming down a city street; a great airliner very nearly plunging into the China Sea because its pilot was laughing uncontrollably, and then weeping with realization of the tragedy he had so nearly caused.

People in crowded Oriental villages running amok, shot down by the police. A Miami surgeon at an operation killed his patient with a sudden vicious stroke and cried like a child that he had done it. A thousand incongruous, horrible incidents.

From every quarter of the earth, medical authorities, scientific bodies and governments were demanding an explanation of Miami. And then the world of the Infra-red began showing. Not only to the infirm—to every one. The strongest man was frightened—terrified, sometimes, at his own mad desire to laugh. Vague red shapes were in the air, murmuring, chattering.

I personally did not experience any of this. Father and the others say it was at first like the sensations we had felt on Xenephrene. The red things were not so tangible or visible—nor so clearly audible, perhaps. Not at first. But every hour, every moment, they were intensifying. Soon, it was far worse.

The world could not understand, but the authorities in Miami knew at once what was happening—that Graff was using the Red Control. It promised disaster; worse, a fate unspeakable—the world gone mad.

The confusion of the Miami authorities now hastily assembled again in conference, was intensified by the red hysteria which was affecting them, as every one else.

Hulda was there; she says it was a bedlam within an hour. She sat quietly watching and listening to the red things coming out from their invisible world. She sat there terrified, not of them so much, for to her they were familiar things—terrified at what they were doing to our world.

A bedlam surged around her, in which father, Freddie and Dan strove to hold a sanity. The President of our United States, listening to what was being reported from abroad, burst into tears. He had never been in robust health; the strain of the past few days had worn his nerves nearly to the breaking point. They took him away, and by then he was laughing and raging alternately.

Out at the beach some one had given

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orders for the searchlight to signal a world surrender. There was no enemy to see it; but no one thought of that. It was wavering up into the sky; but no one in the War Department heeded it. Then it held steady. Then a shouting throng of people rushed it; smashed it.

Father, Freddie and Dan were busy getting the equipment they had brought from Xenephrene into hasty use. The insulated suits were unnecessary. The Infra-red glasses and ear-grids were able to bar out this storming red world. The officials donned them. With normality regained they sat together trying sanely to determine what should be done. A world going mad around them.

Even as they sat, news of the glasses and ear-grids had spread into the city; a mob was surging around the building, shouting demands that the glasses be distributed to them. A few hundred glasses and ear-grids, needed by our fighting aviators, and now the hundreds of millions of people would be demanding them!

An official at the conference seized his telephone to call the head of the Government Research laboratories, demanding that this necessary equipment be manufactured in quantity at once, for world distribution. The very madness in the air made the conference burst into gibing laughter at the futility of it.

Freddie and Dan had had the heat-projector hastily transferred to a Nungess monoplane-type flyer. A tiny affair—nothing, for their purpose, like the huge Arctic A. But it was capable of some four hundred miles an hour under favorable conditions. They donned suits of the black insulated fabric; they had the glasses and ear-grids; the heat-projector, and a small Essen-Bloc airplane gun.

Within two hours they left the chaos of the War Department, took off from an adjacent stage for Graff's Brazilian encampment. This now was no mere test attack to create a diversion! They were determined, by whatever desperate means, to stop the Red Control.

They left with the assurance that the earth's main attack would follow them in a few days. A few days! If the workmen assembling the weapons could hold their reason. The War Secretary laughed a little wildly as he said it. White-faced Hulda flung her arms around Dan and wept. There was in her mind no other belief but that she would never see him again.

CHAPTER XX

THE NIGHT PROWLERS

"WHERE the devil are we?" demanded Dan. "I can't see anything—much less with these cursed glasses."

"Put them back on!" said Freddie sharply.

They had run into a gale from the north, soon after crossing over Cuba. It would have been accounted a storm-wind, before the days of the Great Change. But such winds now were common. A steady, fifty-mile-an-hour blow. Flying with it, they had made great speed. Over Jamaica, across the Caribbean, to strike the Colombian coast near the mouth of the river below Baranquilla.

It was a race against the dawn; by daylight they would be seen by Graff's watchers, before they could get near the barrage; and to wait another day, with the Red Madness stalking the earth, was unthinkable.

At Baranquilla they were flying low. No lights showed. From Baranquilla to Cartagena had been one great city of small farms. It was deserted now. Graff and I, in that swing up to the coast, had cut a swath through it; and the people all fled.

Freddie and Dan swept southeast. A vast territory; mountains, with mines all abandoned; and the forests, and lower farm lands, uninhabited now.

The dawn must have been very near. Dan was anxiously, fearfully watching for it. The Infra-red glasses turned everything a dull, dead gray; the ear-grids muffled sound to an annoying hush.

Dan occasionally would cast them off. The red things were riding the night with the plane. They hovered outside the small inclosed cabin in which Dan and Freddie were sitting. They seemed crowding the cabin itself, their voices jabbering over the muffled motor-throb.

"Keep on those glasses!" Freddie repeated sharply. "Think I want to take any chances, cooped up here with you!"

"I'm all right," Dan growled. "Where the devil are we? You said we were almost there."

"We'll see it shortly. I'll look." Freddie raised the goggles from his eyes. Faintly, far ahead through the overcast night, the crimson glow of Graff's barrage was streaming above the horizon.

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"It's there, Dan! Don't look! I'll descend—"

They swung down, barely skimming the tree-tops; over the roofs of dark farmhouses, white lines of fences, empty fields —abandoned farm country. The barrage came fully over the horizon; they could see the points of concentrated light at intervals around its base where the ground-projectors stood. With the glasses on, it seemed to vanish. It was soundless through their ear-grids; without them its howl was plainly audible.

They were over devastated country now —a dead gray, blank waste. Skimming close over it. Three miles from the barrage. Dan had taken the controls. Freddie was fumbling with the heat-projector and with the Essen-Bloc gun beside it. They donned their black gloves, dropped their masks over their faces; their heads were black-hooded.

"Easy, Dan! Not too low!"

Dan swung them up. Freddie lifted his glasses. He hoped he would see some sign of the Red Control ray streaming through the barrage. They must determine the location of the Control— And then rush at it—

"Off, Dan! Close enough!"

"Too close!" Dan murmured. "If they spot us—"

It would be failure; they must locate the Control first. They swung to the left, paralleling the barrage. Every moment they feared it would tilt suddenly down with its beam darting at them. They could withstand it, but their plane could not—

"Freddie! What's that?"

On the dead-gray surface of the ground ahead of them, figures showed. Two black blobs. The crimson light faintly edged them. Dan swung the plane up, then down, undecided. Two black-garbed figures, running along the ground, away from the barrage. Men! A man, and a half grown boy. The boy leaped ahead; then waited. The man was running steadily—heavily—

FROM the Control house—that brief scene when Graff had turned the current into the crimson globe—Zetta and I were led back to the encampment. Graff gave orders to my guard, and left us, busy with his other duties. The guard was alert, but he seemed out of earshot. I whispered:

"Zetta, you never want to talk to me any more! I must do something to-night —stop that damnable thing—"

"Peter, hush! He'll hear you!"

"I can't help it. Zetta, listen—"

In truth I had no clear idea of what I wanted to say. Some desperate plan! To remain idle and let that crimson globe broadcast madness upon our world was dastardly. My hand went to Zetta's arm, but she drew away sharply.

"Hush, Peter! Do nothing! Go to bed —jus' trust me—"

Trust her! The barrier she had built up between us seemed to fall.

"Zetta, dear, what do you mean? Have you some plan—something, later to-night—"

She knew so much more of conditions here in the camp than I did; she had had more freedom, living almost unguarded in a house with one old woman. And she spoke the language of these Brauns. If she had a plan it would be more rational than mine!

"What is it?" I demanded. "What did you mean by that?"

"Peter, hush! Trust me." She shook me off. "You go to bed. Please, I ask that of you! Trust me—I know best."

She leaped away, leaving me standing there.

I occupied alone a little house which had been built for me by Graff. It stood at an end of one of the cross streets, where the gray blank waste land stretched out to the distant line of barrage. The dry river bed was near it.

My bedroom had one barred door and two barred windows. My guard, relieved by another at intervals, sat by the door. Occasionally at night I could hear him prowling about the house.

I went to bed, but could not sleep. The darkness of my room seemed luminous with purple haze—the protecting purple glow which hung throughout the camp. The world outside had no such protection. The broadcast crimson vibrations were seeking out every tiny corner of the earth.

I must have drifted off—I was awakened by a hand over my mouth; a dark form was beside me in the blackness; a voice murmured in my ear.

"Peter! Be quiet! Don't struggle!"

Zetta's voice! I relaxed. Then I sat up. I could see her dimly. She was dressed in a tight-fitting black smock; tight, long trousers to her ankles, joining black cloth

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shoes. A black hood, pushed back with dangling mask. Black gloves pulled up over her tight black sleeves. The insulating fabric!

"Quiet, Peter! Here, put these on. Hurry!"

She thrust garments at me. In a moment I was dressed like herself. We carried our Infra-red goggles and ear-grids in our hands. There was no time for me to question; she gave me a long curved pod-knife.

"If you have to, use it, Peter. I will lead —hurry—"

I sensed her shudder. The knife was wet. I knew why; in the darkness outside, my guard lay motionless, sprawled face down on the ground. Zetta leaped, I stepped over him. She waited for me; then leaped lightly forward again.

The camp was dark and silent; we avoided a low-humming purple projector. I ran, with Zetta leaping ahead of me. We got safely past the houses. The insects were quartered at the opposite end of the town. None were allowed abroad at night; I was thankful for that. The night was overcast, darker, it seemed, than before. I wondered how near dawn it was; probably very near. Zetta came to the bed of the dry watercourse; jumped down into it. I climbed down, thirty feet, perhaps. In the blackness I ran forward.

Zetta now was at my side, holding one of my hands, trying to draw me on. Miles of this; it seemed hours. A guard from the bank appeared suddenly over our heads. He called softly. Zetta answered. She leaped up and stood beside him; spoke to him; held his attention. I crept up through the gloom, lunged with the knife. He fell.

The barrage line at last was before us; its red glow bathed the bottom of the river bed. Zetta stopped me.

"You mus' get your breath, Peter. Then, run fas'. We will be through it in a few minutes. Oh, Peter, you go so slowly!"

"You run ahead," I told her. "Get through as fast as you can—then wait for me." We were adjusting our glasses, strapping on the ear-grids. "Zetta, where did you get these?"

"From Brea!" The red illumination showed her faint, ironical smile. "We have been planning it for a long time. She was afraid again to try and kill me. But she wants that I never see Graff again. Jealous—and so she has help' us escape. I did not tell her—naturally not —that we would try for the Control house."

"And me? Why help me escape?"

"You, Peter—I tol' her you love me. If she help you escape, then you would marry me. You see? Brea wants that—then I will be los' to Graff forever. So she waited a chance and steal these things—"

MY ARMS went around her. What a time for love-making! But my emotion took no account of the time.

"Marry you, Zetta? Oh, if you will let me! You said 'I am not pledged to you yet, Peter!'" Those words of hers had been like a weight on my heart; a weight which I wanted now to dispel forever. I held her close. "Zetta, you love me—"

She pushed me away; more rational always than I. "That I said—because then the sacrifice to Graff might have been necessary."

"But now—it isn't?"

"No. Not now. Peter—come—run fas'."

At the edge of the barrage a guard was standing on the river bank. He flung a tiny white beam down on us. Zetta called up to him, tried to lure him down. But abruptly he shouted an alarm. From across the river another figure came in a leap, sailing over our heads. We ducked into a hole; above us the two guards stood consulting.

"Zetta, call again! Talk to them—I'll climb up."

I got behind them on top of the bank. I could hear Zetta calling up something about Graff. I lunged at them. One stabbed at me with a short purple flame; but it missed, or my black garments killed it. I struck into them as they stood together; struck with my knife and flailing arms. I could feel their flimsy bodies crack. They sank at my feet.

There seemed no general alarm given; these two guards doubtless were the only ones within hearing at this section of the line. We went through the barrage. Running. With the glasses on, it was all the dead gray of night, and soundless. But I could feel it plucking at me; once I got the impression I was almost wading through it, fighting it. A panic of fear seized me; I laughed to ward it off.

I was laughing when Zetta gripped me, jerked off the glasses and my mask.

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"Peter, stop that! You are all right!"

The cool night air steadied me. We were in the darkness, well beyond the barrage. It was a mile, perhaps, to the Control house. We followed the barrage line, creeping, running, taking advantage of every gully, every hillock. Garbed in black, we were doubtless not easy to see. There was no alarm given.

The dawn was near. We got back through the barrage, inside the line again. A guard near the Control house came up to us. Fortunately he had not seen from which direction we came. He was less suspicious than the others; our masks, glasses and black garments were more to be expected here by the Control than elsewhere. Zetta told him we were from Graff. He sank soundlessly as my knife slashed at his throat.

The two guards in the outer room were almost equally easy. But one screamed. The Control-keeper came out at us. My fist crushed his face.

We were in the Control room! The crimson globe stood there murmuring. Diabolical thing! With my gloved hands I ripped at it; tore its wires; tumbled it down; kicked and wrecked it with a passionate frenzy.

"Enough, Peter! Here, help me with this."

Zetta had been swiftly unfastening the inert purple globe. She gathered up its mechanism, handed it all to me.

"Here—be ver' careful."

It weighed only a few pounds. It seemed not unduly fragile, and I put it under my arm. We were outside again in a minute or two. No one accosted us this time; there seemed no one about but the three sprawled figures; one was twitching as he lay there.

Again we ran. At the barrage I stuffed the globe under my jacket to protect it. When we were outside the red area I could feel the skin of my stomach and chest burning where the light had entered. But we were safe. We ran north, over the gray empty country. The barrage faded to a radiance in the distance behind us. A mile—two miles—I was on the verge of exhaustion. I could not run much further now. But I forced myself. If we could get far away before the dawn we would escape being seen. Then, rest. And by daylight, travel on.

But what a distance! I figured that heading northeast was our best chance, but it might be a hundred miles or more before we encountered any one. The wrecked Control would be discovered by Graff. Pursuit would overtake us. Perhaps I had better send Zetta on ahead with this purple globe. Send her on to safety.

To one side of us, up in the darkness, a shape suddenly took form. A small aero, flying low. An earth airplane! This could be no enemy! Zetta had been leaping ahead of me, waiting after each leap as I plowed my heavy way along. We stood together. I waved my arms.

A small white searchlight caught us as the plane passed close over us. I flung back my hood and mask to meet the light. The plane circled, came back, landed on the level gray expanse.

In a moment we were with the amazed Dan and Freddie; the precious purple globe was safe on board. The twilight of dawn was silvering our plane as we headed northwest, flying for Miami.

CHAPTER XXI

A NEST OF VERMIN

THERE are some things which may be pictured by a shuddering imagination. But one does not voluntarily put them into spoken words; certainly they are never printed. History will say that for twenty-four hours, August 14 and 15 of 1957, our earth was swept by a wild insanity.

The burning of Cape Town by a maddened mob will be mentioned—the glare of the city against the night sky, the thousands who, bereft of reason, cast themselves with screams into the flames. The wrecking of the two great surface liners, with three thousand lives lost. The major riots of a dozen great cities.

The attack by crazed men and women on the Biskra arsenal; the frenzied, half-crazed soldiers who waded heedlessly into the mob, wildly firing; the ten government planes circling over the city whose aviators, crazed by what they saw in the streets and the red madness of the air, firing down with machine guns and then plunging their planes to crash headlong into the crowd.

All high lights. History will only hint at the million individual incidents. Marauding, lustful men, breaking by night into dwellings. Lone criminals, crazed

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into thoughts unspeakable, prowling the dark streets, seeking victims.

But the details, the full or the real truth will never be known. They revolt all but an imagination most morbid. The Red Madness of 1957 had best be forgotten.

It was late in the afternoon of August 15 before the frantic chemists in the government laboratories at Miami could assemble the purple globe and begin the broadcasting of its healing waves. All that evening they were flung out into the ether. The radio was again working —though badly, because the purple vibrations also interfered with it. The world was assured by radio that the danger was over—the Red Madness in a few hours would be gone.

By midnight, August 15, the "etherplane," as scientists now term it, had regained normality. The current was cut from the purple globe. The world rested, exhausted, bewildered, gazing back stupefied at what it had been through.

For hours more, governments, soldiers, police, with sanity come at last, fought sanely with the eddies and backwash of the storm. It wore itself out. Order was restored. There remained the smoking ruins of property destroyed, and the dead, the maimed, and the thousands of poor miserable creatures with reason permanently gone.

A single day of the Red Madness! May there never be, on this or any other world, another day such as that!

On the night of August 15 we were all with Kean in the Miami War Department. He was ready to start back to Xenephrene with the purple globe. Zetta and I were sure that we had destroyed the Red Control; Graff could not use it again. Earth had no further need of the purple. Nature would hold our etherplane at normality, as it always had before. But not so on Xenephrene. Its Infra-red world would not, like earth's remain hidden. What we had been through soon would be coming upon them. Xenephrene was very far from earth now; it would take Kean a month to get there.

Opposition developed in Miami to our sending the purple globe away so soon. But it was overruled; Kean was told to take it and go. He stood before us, bidding good-by. The same quiet dignity he always bore was on him. He turned to our officials who were gathered in a group to wish him well.

"My worl' has brought great disaster upon you. I am sorry. I think you will defeat Graff easily now. I hope so."

Our air force was to start at Graff within a day or two; we were all tense with the thought of it. Kean said goodby to Zetta; shook her hand in our earth fashion. "You choose a ver' wonderful worl', Zetta—and a man ver' good."

A wave of color swept her, but he turned away. His gaze went to Dan and Hulda, who were standing together. "I shall never see you again. I think now, Dan, at the las', you will not mind if I say how ver' much I—love Hulda."

Dan's hand went out and gripped his heartily.

"No, of course not, Kean. You—you are very complimentary. I mean, Hulda and I appreciate how manly—"

Dan was floundering. Good old Freddie came to the rescue. He clapped Kean on the back.

"Kean, listen. You think you're going back to Xenephrene to eat your heart out over a girl you didn't get. That the idea?"

"Why, I—"

"Well, listen. Look at me—I'm a bachelor."

A gleam of humor came to Kean's blue eyes. "I understan', Freddie."

"Good. Now, listen. I've got some advice for you—the advice of a man who's a bachelor and always will be. I've got some deep theories about women—"

Freddie winked broadly at Zetta and Hulda. "All women are marvelous things, Kean—one is as good as another, and maybe better. Remember that! You'll save yourself a lot of trouble in life. And if you miss out with one, just stand still —another one will be along in a minute!"

The strain we had all been under for so long made us laugh immoderately. All but Kean. He was twinkling; but his voice was quietly solemn.

"I thank you, Freddie. It is ver' good advice."

He bowed quaintly; his fingers barely touched Hulda's outstretched hand. He left us hastily.

FROM the roof of the War Department we watched his tiny globe ascending into the star-filled night. Would he ever reach Xenephrene? We never knew; to this day we do not know. But we think so. Father told us then what astronomers, just before the Red Madness, had

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discovered. Xenephrene had broken the orbit of her eclipse about the sun! She seemed heading outward again. Leaving our Solar System, perhaps? Father thought so.

He had suspected, back in those days of Garla, that it might happen. He had mentioned it in his letter to us, saying that Freddie would understand. It had now probably occurred. Xenephrene, the wanderer, might soon be gone from our ken forever.

Best for them—without our sunlight, their purple moon would hold the Infra-red in check, even if Kean, with the purple globe, never reached them. I have wondered since if perhaps those scientists of Garla were not capable of directing, to some extent, their planet's movements? Perhaps their departure was their own method of saving themselves from the Red Terror.

There was another thing which father hinted at now. He believed, with Xenephrene gone, our earth's axis might swing back to its former inclination. He thought—but this no one yet knew—that it was already swinging. The old order of the day and night, the familiar progression of seasons, would return to us. Our great cities—New York, London, Paris, Buenos Aires—now almost abandoned but not yet fallen into ruin, would come back into their own.

"Oh, Peter," he exclaimed, "if you lads can now overcome this enemy! Stamp out these vermin! I will live yet to see my old familiar world restored!"

On the morning of August 18, our air force was ready to start. From Brazil news came that Graff's encampment outwardly showed no change. But it was thought, and afterward we decided it was a fact, that he was planning a new flight of devastation with his flying platforms. It never took place; our attack was first.

Our expedition consisted of a hundred and fifty Arctic A warplanes, each with two or three men, pilot and gunners. We were all garbed in the black garments, with glasses and ear-grids. One plane carried nothing but our lone crimson ray; four other planes carried the four purple-ray projectors and Essen-Bloc long-range guns. The rest carried guns only—the Essen-Blocs and the short-range, old-fashioned machine gun.

Dan, Freddie and I were to fly together. Our plane carried a purple projector, an Essen-Bloc, and a machine gun. We were chosen to lead the expedition because of our familiarity with the Garland weapons, and my knowledge of Graff's lines. The most skillful, most daring young aviators of the world—the pick of a dozen nations—comprised this force we commanded. The plane carrying the crimson projector was flown by Davis and Robinson, sons of the men who had given their lives attacking the Xenephrenes near New York during Graff's first invasion.

We were all linked together by the modern Rand system of air phones—the first time it had been given a practical demonstration. For a test we circled that morning above Miami. Dan ordered them to wheel, to loop, to execute a variety of movements which they did with the skilled precision of a regiment on parade ground.

The people thronged Miami's streets and roof-tops, and cheered. Biscayne Bay was crowded with boats, as at a holiday festival. People everywhere cheered us to battle.

I had just a moment alone with Zetta before we started. How many warriors, in all the ages, of every race and every time, have parted thus upon the eve of battle from the woman they loved!

Zetta at first held out her hand timorously. "Be ver' careful, Peter."

She had said it like that, back in Garla!

"Zetta, aren't you sure now?" I pleaded.

"Of what, Peter?"

"Your love for me. Our love—Kean said. 'You've chosen a good world, Zetta, and a good man.' Do you think that? Have you—chosen—me?"

My arms were outstretched. Oh, it was sweeping me, this love for her, as always it did when I would let it! But I would not force her. "Zetta—haven't you—aren't you sure, now?"

She came suddenly drawn into my arms. Unresisting at last; our love sweeping her into my opened arms; her lips seeking mine. And whispering, "Yes, Peter—I am sure now."

All my dreams of all my life came into reality with the coming of her love.

IN THE sunlight of that morning of August 18, our shining planes left the Miami airport, and, like silver birds soaring with motionless spread of wing, flew southward.

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It was full night when, out of the starlit sky, we sighted Graff's barrage. Our four planes with the purple ray were leading, the others were massed behind and below us. Graff had a brief warning no doubt. We were several miles off when one of his red beams swung down. We could see it coming—a broad band of crimson, like a giant searchlight beam.

It missed us with its first swing. Dan roared his orders into the Rand-phone. I was at the controls. I headed the ship down, in advance of our line, to protect the planes behind us. Freddie leveled our projector. Its narrow purple beam sprang forward at the barrage. Behind us the planes were strung out. Davis and Robinson were well behind.

We were determined not to use the crimson projector in the mêlée of battle. It would confuse our other planes, and be too dangerous to them. We also wanted to protect it, for use in case of last, desperate need. Davis and Robinson were ordered to keep close behind our purple rays.

This showing of our purple ray was Graff's first real knowledge that here on earth the Garland weapons were to be used against him. There must have been panic sweeping the Xenephrene camp at that instant!

Freddie evidently had caught the range. Our purple light mingled with the crimson—mingled and merged into a vacant blackness through which the farther stars showed dimly. The whole front crescent of the barrage swung down at us now; but our four purple beams held it. We roared forward. Black holes of neutral emptiness were ahead; the front face of the Zenephrene red line was broken by our rays.

At two miles we began firing the Essen-Blocs. Graff's crimson beams were waving confusion now from every part of his line. Some of our shells were caught and fired in mid-air; but some got through, undoubtedly. It was soon a chaos, as we darted in. It was to be one brief, desperate, reckless attack; there was not a man of us who had been willing to plan it otherwise.

At a mile we could no longer hold our phone communication. The air was snapping and hissing with its mingling, warring vibrations; the phones went dead. Each plane now had to act for itself.

I headed ours straight in. Freddie was firing the Essen at swift intervals. Our purple light held steady before us, boring its black hole in the confusion of crimson—a black hole into which Freddie was firing as I headed our plane into it.

A few minutes only. It seemed hours. We were so close now that beams from the side angles of the barrage were coming at us. The edge of one caught one of our wing-tips, melted it off. We wavered, but I steadied us.

I had taken off my glasses and ear phones for a moment. The night was a confusion of hissing, crossing beams. Vivid glares—crimson and purple, merging black; a myriad sparks snapping around us; and ahead, a growing yellow-red glare of distant buildings burning. Our shells were finding their mark!

A chaos of color and of sound! The throb and thrum of our motors; the steady click and sharp report of our Essen; the screaming howl of the stricken barrage; the whistling of our shells; the distant crash of their explosions.

Dan was busy passing up the shells to Freddie, and tossing out the falling empties. Once he growled at me: "Look over us, Peter! Damn that fellow Davis—look where he's going!"

Our other three planes, carrying the purple projectors, were flying level with me. But most of the others had climbed.

THE barrage beams were all swinging out and downward. I could see a hundred of our planes in a group mounting to climb over the camp. Davis and Robinson were up there. The crimson beam of their projector showed for a moment, then went out. They seemed climbing higher than all the other planes—spiraling now, straight up. I lost sight of them.

A stray red beam caught some of the soaring planes; they came wavering down, spirals of light, vanishing. One melted as it passed near us; flickered into nothingness like a flame dying.

Our planes up there were firing downward. And then, coming over Graff's line, they were dropping bombs. The yellow glare from the camp village was spreading.

We were now well over Graff's lines. Every one of our planes, save those which we had lost, were over the line now. The very desperation of our attack was irresistible. Graff had no time to prepare a defense. Once within his lines, his immobile ground projectors were im-

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potent to harm us. The barrage was flickering; in sections now it was dark even when our purple rays were turned aside. It was broken, flickering out. Our shells doubtless had hit many of its ground projectors; the planes from high up had hit others with their bombs. The distant south segment of the barrage was still active. Suddenly the whole barrage vanished completely, as one of our shells must have hit its power house. I knew the location of that low frame building in by the river bank; I had been trying to direct Freddie's aim at it.

Five hundred feet above the dead gray ground we flew in toward the camp itself. The barrage was gone; a single last beam came up from the river, caught one of our planes full, and suddenly vanished.

Below us now the ground within Graff's lines was glaring yellow-red from the conflagration of the village. We could see the figures of people and the giant insects running in aimless panic. Our planes shot them down.

Flying platforms were standing in a long line, where Graff had had them ready for his new attack. Panic-stricken Brauns were crowding onto them. Our planes swung low, firing now with machine guns. Across the river most of Graff's Space-vehicles were wrecked and burning from our shellfire. But, at intervals, the small Space-globes were rising. And from everywhere the flying platforms were trying to get away. Our planes attacked them; and far overhead I could now see Davis and Robinson's crimson beam. They were up there, waiting, and any vehicles which escaped us they caught and annihilated.

From the river bank Graff's huge cylindrical Space-liner now struggled up. Its end was gone; smoke and flame were rising from its interior fittings. It rose laboriously, painted red-yellow with the lurid glare from below. I have often wondered if Graff were on it! Making his last effort to escape!

It evidently had no weapons; it rose heavily, with our planes darting after it like wasps, circling it, stabbing its huge vitals with shellfire. It did not get very high; it came down presently, turned completely over, crashed and broke into leaping flames and black smoke rolling up in a cloud.

I had guided our plane across the encampment and back, then circled, as a score of our other planes were circling. We kept firing steadily with the machine gun. We had long since abandoned the purple beams. Most of our planes were now flying low, using the machine guns only.

There were scenes down there in the burning town—where half an hour before more than fifteen thousand people had been living—scenes which now I do not like to remember. They filled us at the time only with triumph—for the memory of the Red Madness was too vivid upon us. No quarter to be given here!

We had determined upon it—all four hundred of us—when we had planned our desperate assault which was to win salvation for our world, or bring death to all of us. No quarter here! A nest of vermin and we were stamping it out.

But Freddie suddenly flung off his glasses; with his hood pushed back, I saw that his face was pallid, and wet with sweat.

"Peter, fly higher! I'm done—I can't do it any more! By God, there are women and children down there! I've been—shooting them down—"

I headed into a climb. Dan tried to use his phone to order the others to stop. But the phone seemed permanently dead.

And then Davis and Robinson's plane abruptly appeared below us. Its red beam sprang downward! Under its crimson light the ground was turning blank! The burning village; the wrecked and burning vehicles; the panic-stricken people left still alive; the dead bodies now strewn everywhere about—all melting, vanishing into nothingness.

Dan with a growling curse had fumbled with his phone and then cast it aside. Perhaps Davis and Robinson, sitting grimly behind their crimson projector, steeling their hearts with memory of the Red Madness, with memory, too, of their fathers, and with no desire save to protect their world—perhaps they were right in doing what they did. It is not for me to judge.

We climbed, and for a long time I did not again look down. When I did, the yellow-red glare of the conflagration had vanished. A circular ten-mile spread of blank, dead-gray ground lay beneath us. Over it, some of our planes were circling low, with white searchlights examining it. Vacancy complete—where so short a time before had been the most diabolical

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enemy, the greatest menace which ever had assailed our earth!

CHAPTER XXII

PEACE ON EARTH

IT IS common knowledge now how the great purple star departed as inscrutably as it had come. Throughout those concluding months of 1957, it steadily faded until at last it was gone. The Wanderer! It is out there now, wandering somewhere among the stars. With our imaginations we may follow it, but no way else. It has left the name we gave it written large across the most tragic pages of our history—but itself is only a memory.

It would be superfluous for me to recount familiar world events as the old order of day and night, the old progression of the seasons gradually returned. By September, 1957, astronomers had announced that the earth's axis was swinging back to its normal inclination. It reached there, they told us, in June, '58.

There was another year of adjustment —storms, torrential rains, floods, a disarrangement of all our earth activities newly established since the Great Change. But fortunately, the new conditions had existed for a very short time —it was not difficult to return to the old. I saw, in our Western World, swift evidence of that. Property in the north was reclaimed. Settlers in the tropics began returning. By the end of '58, New York and all the other great cities of the temperate zones, both north and south, were well on their way toward rehabilitation.

With us of human mold, lifelong habits are not easily broken, and are quickly resumed. It is good to feel the warm summer of July, with daylight and darkness coming as they should! Welcome autumn days, merging into winter—with the knowledge that spring will come again!

Within my own lifetime I suppose, there will be slight evidence left anywhere on earth of the Great Change. They say that the tropics will always be more densely populated than before; that some of the industry started there will remain. But on the whole, those fearsome tragic months will linger only as a memory; and soon, when all of us on earth now have passed—they will fade from memory into tradition; then into legend. And the world will go on into the other great changes perhaps—and even legend of this one will be forever forgotten and lost forever.

But now as I write, with the curtain so recenty rung down upon its horror, it is all too vivid. The old routine is come back to earth. Father and Freddie are with the Dutch Astronomical Bureau, in Chile, where I am to join them when I have finished helping reestablish the A.B.A. in New York. Dan and Hulda are in Porto Rico. Things are very much as they were before. Our world, for me, for every one, is hardly different.

But there is a difference. Out of the tragedy and horror of those months, has come, I think, a benefit to our world. The Great Change brought all the nations, people of every race, into a sudden community of interest. Like brothers in a family sorely pressed, they fought united against a suddenly wrathful nature. And then fought the invaders from Xenephrene.

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (Adv.)

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We four hundred young men—the pick of the world united—when we flew against Graff that night in Brazil, I think we raised then a monument to a new earthly spirit. It was our united world against another world. Our united life, or death! We cannot soon forget that.

A lesson from Xenephrene! Economists sometimes use that phrase. There was much that the Garlands had come to realize which we of the earth might well heed! Economists are saying it.

And we are heeding it; I see it now in little things all around me. The nations are planning now to establish a working basis of industry and agriculture whereby each may produce without competition from the other, what it can give the world best and most cheaply. An economy of effort! It will decrease enormously the world's work.

They had been planning a gigantic municipal subway to run the length of Long Island, to handle the new population which is coming steadily from the tropics. But the subway plans were yesterday defeated. New York, they claim, will not grow so large. The new radio power-sending stations will make every farm a small factory if need be.

The age of steam flung us into roaring infernos of cities; the age of electricity will send us back into God's green country. They say that is happening now. And I have read in newspaper editorials —and heard, just this evening in the Government radio broadcast—that we would do well, by ourselves, and most of all by our children, if we heeded the lesson from Xenephrene.

I have been just now in Zetta's bedroom, standing in the dimness gazing down into the cradle where our little son lies sleeping. Xenephrene brought tragedy upon our world—a lesson for good, perhaps; but to me it brought a great happiness. I see Zetta lying there, like a little child herself, so early asleep to-night. She gave up everything for me. I mentioned it to her once, soon after we were married. She smiled her quaint smile and held me close.

"Back in Garla, Peter, your father used to read from his Bible. A ver' wonderful book—for the Garlands, for all, it is all the same. There was a place in the Bible, I memorize' it. You say, Peter, for you I have given up my worl'. And I answer, like Ruth:

"'Whither thou goest, I will go; thy people shall be my people—'"

I sit here to-night finishing these pages. A great thankfulness is upon me. Out of the horror of the past, I have come to-night with a dear father still holding his health and strength; a loving sister, happily married to a man I respect and admire. I have a bachelor friend, joyous with his chosen lot.

I have a beautiful, adoring wife, to realize every romantic dream of my boyhood, to mother our lusty little son growing up to personify all the good which is within us both.

I am very singularly blessed.

THE END

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Ariel's Song

FULL fathom five thy father lies:
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
Hark! now I hear them, —
Ding, dong, Bell.

ARIEL'S SONG FROM "THE TEMPEST"
BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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Wild Wullie, The Waster

By TOD ROBBINS

When billiard balls carom on a green felt table all of their own accord . . . it might be the wind! But when a massé, and a draw shot, and a perfect three-cushion are scored consecutively by unseen hands . . . ?

I MUST bridge the River Styx and retrace my steps to the other shore. It is difficult for me to once again inhabit the worn-out shell which for so many years I called *myself;* to mentally conjure up the petty human emotions which spurred me to rash words and still rasher deeds; to describe to you, my gentle ghostly readers, the lamentable and inexcusable quarrel which ended so disastrously for Roderick Dingwall and myself. However, I must not dodge the issue. I have taken up the pencil, and I will not turn back. Unfortunately for my natural egotism, this chronicle opens at a period when I was still alive.

As I sit beside the library window in a pale shaft of moonlight, what a pitiful atom of dust my former mortal self appears! Blown hither and thither by every earthly passion, it yet had the colossal conceit to consider itself a reasonable being living according to a reasonable plan. Roderick is sitting near me, his chin resting on his hand. The white linen about his throat glimmers faintly. Poor Roderick! He was another such as I—both blind atoms whirling in the wind. And now he must wear that stock always or else— But I must begin at the beginning or there can be no end.

When my brother—the twelfth Laird of Brangler—died I was living a shabby, out-of-elbows existence in a small boarding-house in London. Since my father's death, forty years before, Alexander and I had scarcely laid eyes on one another. Perhaps I was to blame for this; for, although I had run through a considerable part of the family fortune, I had never squandered a grain of the family pride—but I rather think it was my memory of him which held me back like a ball and chain.

He was a mean man even when young—mean and cunning with a white film over one eye like a patch of frost on a window-pane. They say he had a bag of gold pieces still clutched in his fist when they fished him out of the lake back of the house; and that, if he could have made up his mind to let go of it, he might have weathered it through to the other bank. However, that's beside the question.

When I received word that Alexander was dead, my first thought was of Roderick. He and I had grown old together. Starting out as wild lads, we had had vices enough to fill a stable. But a vice is a poor nag to ride when a man has no gold spurs strapped to his heels. Then old age and old wine had taken the marrow out of our bones. Two doddering fossils now, all we cared for was our Saturday-night game of billiards. Once a week we met in a rowdy basement just off the Strand and played with cues like shillalahs and billiard-balls like the eggs of some unsystematic mother goose.

Now, of course, all this could be changed. Roderick and I would pack up and leave London for good. We would settle at Brangler Hall and there regale ourselves in a manner becoming elderly gentlemen of means. I remembered with a kindling of the blood the well-appointed billiard-room my father had installed shortly before his death. Surely the rats and spiders had not been able to completely destroy this sanctum during my brother's unsympathetic reign. And then there was the old gentleman's wine cellar. Surely between those hallowed walls

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Roderick entered into my plans for the future with enthusiasm. The prospect of a happy old age spent in the seclusion of Brangler Hall, with unlimited leisure to bestow on his favorite pastime, brought a glint to his eye and a flush to his cheek. He even trod a few steps of the Highland fling, his old knee-bones clattering.

Well, to cut a long story short, we sailed for Scotland that very week with never a thought of the black trouble in store for us. Indeed, as we drove up the broad driveway, we were more like two schoolboys out on a jaunt than two gray-bearded old sinners with not many more

"I was standing immediately above my discarded, mortal shell, and I viewed it with a new-born loathing"

the mellow port and burgundy had gained the subtle tang which only longevity bestows. Although, as I have already said, my friend and I had pawned most of our vices, still a glass of rare old wine could enhance the moments we spent tête-à-tête.

years of life in our bones at the most. Every tree and bush, every thicket and hedge, seemed to hold out a hand in greeting. And the old house itself, with the red ivy clinging to it like the rusted armor of my forebears, had all the look of a proud mother.

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"Welcome home!" the wind seemed to be singing through the fir trees. "Welcome home to Brangler Hall!"

AS SOON as Roderick and I had removed the stains of travel, we hurried down to the banquet hall. Here it was, in this great wainscoted room—a room where the gentry for miles around had so often wined and feasted till the break of dawn—that we met with our first mischance. Two steaming bowls were waiting for us, one at either end of the board, and they contained nothing but a meager mess of porridge. I give you my word, the very portraits on the walls curled their lips at the sight of it.

"Like master, like man," I thought to myself and clapped my hand down on the bell. And then old Tam—serving man in the family for fifty-odd years—hobbled in, soft-footed in his list slippers.

"What's the meaning of this?" said I, cocking my eye at the bowl of porridge. "Is such hogs' swill fit for the Laird of Brangler Hall and his guest?"

At that, Tam grinned at me in a most disrespectful fashion. "Aye," he mumbled. "It's been gude enow for the Laird of Brangler Hall and his guests for mony years. 'Tis better for the saul when the belly's no ower full o' flesh and fowl and ither puir murdered beasties—so at least my dead master was thinkin'."

"He and his thoughts are buried together," I broke in sternly. "There's a new master in Brangler Hall, and you'd best be minding it. Now be off to the kitchen and tell the cook to serve us something fit for a gentleman's stomach. And you can be bringing back with you a bottle of wine from the cellar."

"But I dinna ken rightly whar to be lookin' for the wine, Master Wullie."

"You need not be looking," Roderick broke in very sharp. "By the shade of your nose, it should lead you aright."

Tam left the room with a grieved air.

"Daft fules both!" I heard him mutter under his breath. "A puir body's no safe wi' 'em." But for all his dolorous shakes of the head, his prolonged sighs, when next he appeared he carried with him cheer for two hungry and thirsty men—a nice cut of venison and a bottle of wine gray with cobwebs.

You may be sure that Roderick and I did the provender ample justice. Between mouthfuls, I cross-questioned Tam about my dead brother. As yet the mystery attached to his sudden and ungentlemanly demise had not been cleared up.

"What induced the laird to go out of the house at that time of night?" I asked.

Tam's wizened face drew up into knots of cunning.

" 'Tis no so difficult to understand," he mumbled. " 'Twas just the fear of his ain brother spurred him on."

"The fear of *me?*"

"Just that. Dr. MacPherson told him a month back that his days were numbered. He got thinkin' o' the ill use ye'd be puttin' to all the gude siller he'd saved betimes. The thought o' that was like fire in the puir body's brain. 'Wild Wullie, the Waster,' was his name for ye in his best moods. Soon he got wanderin' awa' from the Hall, searchin' nae doot for a hidin'-place for his treasure. Midnight was his favorite hour for prowlin' aboot the grounds. One dark night he slipped into the lake by mischance. Alec was a gude lad, but one who wadna let a bag o' siller slip frae his fingers once he gripped it. I misdoot this wee vice led him to his watery grave—*him,* who should hae died like a Christian between white sheets, with God lookin' on and smilin' or maybe droppin' a tear from His een. It's great and wonderful what the power of prayer—"

"Roderick," I broke in, rising, "let's you and me seek the seclusion of the billiard-room. Religion is the one subject which Tam and I agree upon."

The old man gave me a disbelieving stare as I turned to the door.

" 'Wild Wullie the Waster' a Christian!" he mumbled. "Na, na! I'll no believe that till the puir sauls in the kirk-yard rise up and confirm the glad news. Wild Wullie the Waster is kin to the prodigal son. First he maun lie down with hogs and eat husks. So 'tis written in the gude Book."

CHAPTER II

THE LAST GAME

SOON Roderick and I settled comfortably into the groove of our new existence. Fortunately the billiard-room, although in disuse for so many years, had been kept scrupulously clean. Tam did not number laziness among his faults. Each morning, with a gray duster wound tight about his bald pate, resembling a

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decrepit old pirate retired from the high seas, he superintended the maids at their work. And what a taskmaster he was with the lasses!—his sharp, old tongue snapping behind their bent backs like the lash of a dog-whip, his bitter blue eyes roving here and there for a speck of dust overlooked. Like many another old bachelor, he considered that the opposite sex owed him a lasting debt, and was not slow in taking his payment in threats and gibes.

But Roderick and I gave Tam little heed, except to see that he provided us with the wine and food due our station. All our time was spent at billiards. Winter set in before we had been a week in Brangler Hall—great falls of snow which made the driveway impassable and a steady wind from the northeast which cut the face like sharp, snapping twigs. So we had no mind to go out, but just stayed in the house as snug as two fleas on a sheep-dog, and played billiards from morn till night.

Now, say what you will, it's a difficult thing to see but one face day after day and not in time grow to hate it. And it's aggravating for two men to sit by the fireside with nothing to say to each other but just the threadbare topics of speech grown thin from overhandling. There's madness in solitary confinement, yes; but there's madness and there's murder when two are locked up in the same cage.

It was not long before Roderick began to get on my nerves. He had a slow, hesitating way of speech which set my eardrums tingling as though a handful of nettles had been thrown into them, a wart just beneath his right cheek-bone which seemed to grow larger as the days went by; but what aggravated me most in the man was his Adam's apple. It was a gymnastic Adam's apple, popping up and down like a jack-in-the-box; and it was as large and round as a billiard-ball, making the wrinkled skin of his neck all tight and shining where it bulged out like an orange through a paper bag. Toward the last, the sight of it would unnerve me so that I would often miss a simple shot.

Now, do not judge by this that my nerves alone were chafed raw. Roderick has since confided in me that there were little mannerisms of my own which touched him on sensitive spots like a lash. The way I had of clicking my tongue when I had made a difficult shot, the leisurely fashion with which I took aim, the jubilant air in which I called out the points I had scored—all these trifles at the time made him see red.

Well, matters went on from bad to worse between us. Soon we had no civil word for one another. Silent we were for the most part, sitting with averted eyes while Tam poured out the wine with a sour grin. The friendly rivalry of old times had disappeared entirely, giving place to a dour determination to win at all costs, a sweating anxiety over each shot. As Tam said—we were ganging clean draft ower that deil's game.

AT LAST our smoldering resentment flared up into open hatred and even bloodshed. What a disgraceful scene it was for two doddering old men who should have long since put worldly matters out of their heads!

One bitter cold night in December—a night when the wind was waltzing around the house like a mad old lady, beating out time to her antics by clapping the shutters together like castanets—Roderick and I, as usual, repaired to the billiard-room in grim silence. Each man drew his cue from the rack as though it had been a sword, and then our final game of billiards in the flesh began.

Roderick won the toss. With frowning brows and stealthy-sliding Adam's apple, he bent over the table and made a very pretty three-cushioned shot. He followed that up with another which very nicely bunched the balls in one corner. At that, he paused to shoot a scornful grin at me over his shoulder. Then he bent forward again with the air of a man who intends making the most of a good opportunity.

Now, as the cue moved slowly back and forth between his finger-bones, just as he was about to shoot, a great gust of wind dropped down the chimney and blew a handful of ashes into my face. I sneezed—God bless me, how could I help it?—Roderick's bent elbow twitched and the cue-ball slipped to one side, missing both the others as neat as a whistle.

"I see you've missed your shot," said I, speaking pleasant enough.

"Missed!" says he, looking up with a fiery red face. "By Heaven, Mr. Campbell, your ancestors should be proud of you this night!"

"How's that, Mr. Dingwall?" I asked, cold as ice. The jerking Adam's-apple of the man made my gorge rise.

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"By that, Mr. Campbell, I'm meaning that 'tis not a gentlemanly way to resort to such tricks and contrivances while engaged in sport. In short, Mr. Campbell, to sneeze at such a critical moment is proof enough for me of what I've long suspected."

"And what may that be, Mr. Dingwall?"

"That there's very little of the gentleman about you but the name, Mr. Campbell," he says very short, turning his back on me. "A clip-eared, bob-tailed kind of gentleman were you always, although I was fool enough not to heed it."

Now, there's a strain of the wild MacGregor blood in me—blood which makes me see red at an insult. Roderick's words and his lifted lip stirred up a raging Rob Roy. Without a thought to our lifelong friendship, I strode up to the man and struck him with my open hand which brought the crimson to his cheek.

"You'll keep a civil tongue in your head when speaking to your betters, Mr. Dingwall!" I cried.

At that, being a man of some temper himself, he went wild, and was at me with the cue in his hand. Up and down the room it went—blow for blow, cues rattling like the devil's dice box, and with no thought in either of us but to kill. At the best, it was no Christian sight to see.

What with the rattling of cues and roaring of oaths, it was no time before old Tam and the waiting lasses were peering in at us through the open door.

"Gude save us!" cried Tam, wringing his hands for all there was a wicked light in his eye. "Gude save us! What's all this to do? Put by your weapons, gentlemen! Think on your ain gray hairs!"

But we gave him no heed. We had warmed to our work by now, and the devil himself could not have parted us. Both skilled swordsmen when young, some of our former prowess had returned to us. Two nimble old bucks we were, leaping about like chestnuts on the hob. Soon Tam's tune changed. Some of the fire of combat had oiled his old joints. Out of the corner of my eye I could see him hopping about.

"Gude stroke, Master Wullie!" he cried as I laid my cue across Roderick's shoulders. "Gude stroke, Master Wullie! Gie it to him again! Dinna step back, Master Wullie! It's no the way o' a Campbell! Watch his een—that's aye the fashion wi' swordsmen. Hoot, mon! Guard your head, Master Wullie! Ah, the deil's in it!"

At that moment my cue slipped from my hand. Before Roderick realized what had happened, he struck again—this time at my now unprotected head. A great flame leaped before my eyes, followed almost immediately by silence and blackness. I felt that I was dying—I died.

CHAPTER III

THE MARK OF THE ACT

AS ALL true ghosts know, the transition from one life to another is instantaneous. And yet what momentous transformations take place in the mind! All our meager human thoughts are enlarged a thousand times. The puzzling enigmas of human existence immediately become childishly simple. A great tide of understanding sweeps through us, making us blush for our former blunders. The knowledge of the infinite—that enduring mental peace of clarified vision—unites us forever. We are a great brotherhood of spirits in which both competition and jealousy are unknown.

Hardly had I died before I opened my eyes and lived again. I was standing immediately above my discarded, mortal shell. Now I looked down on it with contempt. I had thought rather highly of my body only a few short minutes ago, now I viewed it with disgust. So this was the thing which I had been pampering all these years, feeding it lavishly, obeying its vicious caprices, and even studying it with adoring eyes in my shaving mirror. What a fool I had been! Surely there was nothing lovable in this fat old man lying dead on the carpet—in this waxen puppet with the lack-luster eyes and protruding paunch. For the first time I caught a true vision of myself, and it was far from flattering.

"Gude save us! Ye've slain Master Wullie!"

It was Tam who thus broke the silence. He was on his knees beside the corpse with his hand on its breast. His withered old face was ashen, and his head shook from side to side as though he had the palsy.

My eyes sought Roderick. He was standing in identically the same spot as when I had seen him at my last gasp—his feet wide apart, his right hand grasp-

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ing the billiard cue. But the expression on his face had changed. On it now was written a great horror and self-loathing.

"I'll just be gangin' awa' to Dr. MacPherson," said Tam, rising unsteadily to his feet and stepping through me as though I had been so much air. "Not that there's any hope at all," he added sourly. "Master Wullie's puir saul hae sped." At the door he paused, and I knew that he was whispering to the scared lasses: "Mary, just slip awa' to Squire Templeton's over the hill and tell him murder's been done at the Hall. Peg, bide here a bit and keep your een on that Dingwall man. Justice will no owerlook this, I'm thinkin'."

When Roderick and I were left alone together he went down on his knees by the corpse. He was shaking all over like a tree in a gale, and his Adam's-apple was leaping about as though demented.

"God help me!" he muttered. "God help me!"

Well, I put my hand on his shoulder then, so great a pity I had for the man, and I spoke kind words in his ear—but neither my touch nor my voice was consoling at all. You see, he could neither feel my hand nor yet hear my voice; and I knew it well enough at the time, but habit was too strong for me.

And also I knew what was going on in his brain. Self-destruction was plotting there. And how was he to know that it is only the blow which a man strikes himself that leaves a telltale mark in his second life? But *I* knew, and I feared for my friend.

After a time he stood up again with a wild light in his eye. "They'll never take me alive," he says very solemn, and tramps out of the room without so much as a look behind.

Down the great hall he went, while I flitted at his heels—down the great hall and out into the moonlight and cold. Then away through the snow he plodded, taking long steps like a man walking a race; and I still at his heels, like a spaniel.

Well, there was a full moon that night—a calm moon with a patient, sorrowful face. Across the glistening snow she beckoned us on to the lake which shone like a black diamond through the trees. Roderick never paused or faltered. He was a firm man, once he made up his mind; and I knew there was no stopping him. Soon we were standing on the bank, all glistening now as though encrusted with tiny sapphires. And it was here I met my brother.

Yes, there he sat as lonely as a scarecrow, his blind eye squinting up at the moon and all frosted with cold, a bag of gold pieces gripped tight in his fist. All in all, he was a deplorable sight to see.

"So this is what comes of taking your own life!" I thought as I seated myself beside him. "Will Roderick be such another?"

AFTER a moment Alexander spit a piece of ice out of his mouth and spoke. "Wullie," he says very pleasant, while the icicles in his beard tinkled faintly like tiny bells, "Wullie, are ye bringin' me company?" And he jerked his thumb toward Roderick, who stood very tall and straight on the bank.

"Heaven forbid, Alec!" said I, slipping into the familiar speech of our boyhood. "It's no the sort o' death I'd be wishin' a friend of mine. Nor the sort o' life after," I added, with a look at his frosty eye.

"Ye'll be no haunting him then to his end?" he says with a kind of sigh. "Weel, that's a pity. It's lonely here on winter nights—unco lonely! But in the summer it's no so wearisome. We hae the music o' frogs and whippoorwills and wee hoot-owls. Ye should see the bats frisk aboot it! It's a merry spot in the summer!"

"He'll no join ye wi' my consent," I broke in sharply.

"But, mon, I tell ye he'd *like* it in the summer," Alexander says as smooth as oil. "There's life here then—weasels and ferrets and snakes ye can wear aboot your neck like a chain." He bent forward, and I felt his breath like a cold draft in my ear. "And there's money—Wullie—muckle gold pieces to spend."

At that I laughed aloud. "I misdoot ye'd be only too glad, Alec, to have him share your load. But he'll no do that, for I'm thinkin' this lake has a good foot of ice above water. He canna very weel drown himsel' tonight."

"But he can *try*," says Alexander, still hopeful. "He can *try*, Wullie. Now, should he dive from that bank yonder, he'd crack his skull like a hickory-nut."

"Na, na!" I cried in anger. "Ye hae no changed muckle since lang syne. Ye are ever thinkin' o' yersel', Alec. But ye canna hae Roderick—even now he's awa' to the house."

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Indeed, Roderick had turned away with a doleful shake of his head, and was plodding back wearily over the snow. His black shadow lay at our feet.

" 'Tis a pity," says Alexander then with a shake of his head and a hypocritical smile. "I'm thinkin' he'll be findin' a worse way to shake off his skin—some coarse, bluddy way, nae doot. Weel, 'tis yer ain business, Wullie."

With that, my brother turned his back on me and closed his eyes. But I could see by the way he munched his jaws that he was out of sorts with the world. He never even wished me good night as I flitted away.

Well, as I followed Roderick back to the house, Alexander's unpleasant prophecy haunted me. What could I do to keep my friend from some rash act which would leave a lasting mark in his life to come? Then, for the first time, I realized the pitiful impotence of a ghost to shape the affairs of the living. I wrung my hands in despair as I flitted over the snow.

But soon a ray of hope came to me. Surely there was one thing I could do—I could appear before Roderick in my old bodily shape at twelve o'clock. It was the unwritten law of the spirit world. At twelve o'clock, then, if he lived till that hour, I would appear before him and make him understand by gestures the severe punishment which attended the crime of suicide.

By now we had reached the house. Roderick, without a glance to right or left, mounted the stairs to his own room. In gloomy silence he approached his dresser, pulled out one of the drawers and took a razor from it. As he opened it, the blade shone blue in the moonlight.

You can imagine my feelings, then, my gentle ghostly readers. Horror overmastered me. I called to him, but he did not hear me; I seized his arm, but it passed through my fingers. And now my only hope rested in the grandfather clock which stood in the hall. Would it strike twelve before this crime was perpetrated?

One fact gave me hope. Roderick did not seem to be in any hurry about cutting his throat. On the contrary, he went about his preparations with marked deliberation. Several times he felt the edge of the razor with his thumb, and once he stropped it carefully to a fine edge. Finally he raised it to his throat, but even then he hesitated. Evidently he wished to taste the unlawful sweets of suicide to the dregs.

Lowering the razor, he was plunged into a profound revery. I heard him murmur: "If I don't get it over with, they'll swing me up as high as a church steeple. Think of the disgrace in a Dingwall dangling from the gallows'-tree. I maun do it."

Again he lifted the razor till it hovered just beneath his Adam's-apple. But at that very instant, to my joy, the clock below stairs began to strike twelve. "I'll wait till it's done," he muttered peevishly. "It's—"

But I gave him no time to finish his sentence. With a glad cry, I leaped out of the shadows and confronted him in my bodily form. Pointing at his throat, I shook my head angrily.

Alas, poor Roderick! He thought that I'd come out of my grave to see that he went into his. At my sudden appearance, his hand shot backward and the blue steel blade sheared his throat from ear to ear.

As I bent over him, as I tried to quench the flow of his blood, he cowered away with fear and loathing in his eyes. "Gang awa', ye warlock!" he gasped through foam-flecked lips. "Gang awa'—the deil and ye hae done for me!" Then his head slithered back on the floor, and he died with the black curse of suicide on him.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEIL'S GAME

NOW it wasn't longer than the space of a deep breath before Roderick lived again. But it was as I had thought—the poor man bore the mark of his last earthly misdeed. His throat, where the razor had bitten home, was not a pretty thing to see. Red it was, and gaping like a toothless laugh. But poor Roderick did not heed it at first. He was all for shaking my hand and thanking me for what I had tried to do.

"To think," said he, with a tear in his eye, "that you should have bothered so over a man who had just taken your life! That bespeaks a kind heart, Wullie Campbell. A misdirected good action is none the less a good action."

"Misdirected?" I cried. "What may you be meaning by that?"

"It's as plain as the nose on your face, man," says he, giving his corpse on the

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floor a scornful look. "Am I not better out of that ugly carcass when all's said and done?"

"Perhaps," said I, realizing that the man had not as yet grasped the truth. "But will you be saying that, Roderick, when you know the worst? Step up to the mirror on the wall and just be taking a look at yourself."

At that his face fell, and I could see that there was fear in him. He wheeled about on his heel and stepped up to the mirror, which shone gray in the moonlight. For a long moment he stood there without a word—then I heard a click in his throat like a clock running down.

"Good heavens!" he cried, putting his hand over his eyes. "Good heavens!"

And that was all I could get out of him for a long time. Poor Roderick! A neat man he had been in life, a man who had ever kept an eye on his personal appearance; and now in death he was a neat ghost by temperament and training, supersensitive to anything which might mar his good looks. No wonder the sight of that red, smiling throat was enough to turn the joy of resurrection sour in his mouth.

Well, I did my best to console him. But it was hard going at the best. Finally I hit on a scheme which made him brighten up a bit.

"You'd best wear a white stock from now onwards, Roderick," I suggested. "It's becoming enough to a ghost with your cast of feature. And it's neat as a pin, Roderick."

"Neat it may be," he says with a sour smile, "but it's an article of dress I never much fancied. It's suggestive of boils. However, when the deil drives—" He shook his fist at the mirror. "Well, Willie man, I'll be doing just as you say."

The stock worked miracles with my friend's peace of mind. It wasn't long before Roderick was his old merry self again. And also it had a quieting effect on my own nerves. To say nothing of his cut throat, he had always had a gymnastic Adam's-apple which, in my opinion, was better hid. With the stock nicely tied, his long, curly locks all silvery in the moonlight, he was as handsome a ghost as a man could find in a night's walk.

WE SOON settled back into our midnight game of billiards—only now there was no bitterness at all, but just pride in our skill and mutual understanding. And we discarded the cues altogether, just guiding the balls by the strength of our minds. A calm, thoughtful game it was, with the moon as a marker—the balls clicking gently together, and now and then the sad sigh of the wind in the fireplace.

And we were careful not to let Tam and the waiting lasses get sight or sound of us. We knew well enough that if they once caught a glimpse of us standing about in corners, they'd be out of the house in no time. Then who could we get to tidy the billiard-room and brush the dust from the table? It's been my experience that only a silly, childish ghost goes about trying to impress humans by maybe a groan or two or by the glimpse of his face in the moonlight. What's to be gained by it?—just silence and dust and loneliness. A deserted house with the cobwebs dangling from the ceiling, and the rats playing hide-and-go-seek in the walls, is no proper home, as I have found by bitter experience.

Well, as I have already said, Roderick and I were silent and wary. But we hadn't taken into consideration Tam's prying, thieving ways—his old ears religiously pricked for the devil's gossip, his old eyes squinting through keyholes and around corners. One night he caught us red-handed.

It was well past twelve o'clock. Roderick and I had been playing billiards for upwards of an hour. Absorbed in our game, and thinking the servants safe in bed and snoring, we were little prepared for the sudden opening of the door and the flashing on of the lights. In fact, Roderick had just made a shot, and the ball was still rolling.

"What hae I told ye?" cried Tam, hopping about like a Punch and Judy. "The deil's playing billiards in Brangler Hall!"

He spoke to a solemn man who had come in with him, a man wearing glasses whom I recognized as Lawyer McTavish, of Edinborough. The two of them were staring at the billiard balls with their eyes nearly popping out of their heads.

"A very pretty shot," said McTavish at last with a kind of sick smile. "Three cushions and never a hitch to it! A well-planned shot. What's the trick to it, Tam?"

"There's no trick to it at all!" cried Tam in anger. "'Tis naething more nor

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less than Master Wullie and his friend playin' at billiards. Mony's the night I've stood out in the hall in my night-cap and slippers, drawn frae my bed by the click o' the balls. I canna rightly dance attendance on ghaists. It's no seemly for a mon o' my years."

While Tam thus expressed himself, McTavish examined the billiard table carefully. First he picked up the balls and held them to his short-sighted eyes; next he rolled them across the green cloth; and finally he bent down and looked under the table. Roderick and I, swathed in our garments of invisibility, interchanged smiles. All he could get would be a crick in the neck for his pains.

"Ye'll find naething o' interest," Tam continued. "Weel enow I grasp that ye lawyer bodies hae little or no respect for the ways o' the deil. Ye think ye've improved on 'em, nae doot. Howsomever, here's real witchcraft afoot, and ye may as weel confess it."

At that, McTavish looked up and straightened his back. "I can't understand it, and that's true enough," said he. "Now, if the window had been up, I'd say the wind might have done it. Or if we had not switched the lights on, I'd say a rat had started the ball rolling with the swish of his tail. But as it is, perhaps—"

"Hoot, mon!" cried Tam peevishly. "Gie the deil credit and hae done! 'Tis no muckle matter when all's said—just a wee three-cushion shot like I've seen Master Wullie contrive mony's the time."

McTavish ran his hand through his hair. "I think the least said about this the better," he muttered. "Keep a quiet tongue in your head when the new owner of Brangler Hall arrives in the morning."

"I'll no be aboot the premises," said Tam. "'Tis time I was restin' my auld bones. I'm awa' wi' the sunrise."

"Well, I wouldn't talk about it to the neighbors," McTavish continued. "Silence is golden." He put his hand in his pocket and drew out a guinea. "Here's for your trouble, my man," he says very lordly. "Now, you can just be showing me the upstairs rooms before I take my departure."

With that, the two of them stole out of the room, peering back warily over their shoulders, and leaving Roderick and me to our thoughts and our billiards. But, as for me, I could not give the game my undivided attention for wondering about the new owner of Brangler Hall.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW OWNER

TAM was as good as his word. At the first peep of dawn, just as Roderick and I were off to the attic where we rested for the day, we saw him hobbling away across the snow. There was a great sack on his back, containing his worldly goods, and a round dozen bottles of my father's best wine besides; and a stout staff in his hand like the holy men of old time leaned their weight upon. As he breasted the hill, a shaft of sunlight turning his bald pate to a halo, he seemed more like a saint than a sinner.

"Now who'll be dusting up after us?" says Roderick very solemn. "A neat man's been lost to Brangler Hall, Willie."

"Neat he may have been," said I, "but he was not too well disposed towards us, I'm thinking. Peeping through keyholes at an hour when decent bodies are in their beds, pricking his ears to catch an echo from hell like an old woman living over an ale-house! No, Roderick, I think Brangler Hall's well rid of him."

"It may be," says he with his eye at the broken lattice. "But he was neat, for all that—and neatness comes next to godliness. He kept the billiard-table in grand shape, Willie. But who's this coming up the driveway? I'm thinking it's the new master of Brangler Hall."

At that, I wheeled about on my heel and took another long look through the shutter. A carriage had drawn up in front of the house; and out of it presently stepped two handsome lads, dressed in the height of fashion. One was tall and dark as the night, with a cast of feature which proclaimed him a Campbell; the other was short and broad, with flaxen hair and a bold blue eye. They could have scarcely numbered twoscore years between them.

"I'm thinking the taller one is my own cousin's son, Hector Campbell," I said with a sudden warmth in my heart. "By right he falls heir to the Hall. Is he no a bonnie laddie?"

"Aye," says Roderick, with his face to the lattice, "he's got the Campbell looks. But the other, Willie! Man, man, who do you think that fair-haired laddie is?"

"Surely no kin of yours, Roderick?"

"He is that!" cried Roderick. "My own brother's son. He was in Oxford the last I heard. The world's a small place!"

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"So small we're always rubbing elbows. Hector was at Oxford, too. They're fast friends, no doubt; and here for the vacation together. Well, we'll give them a warm welcome to Brangler Hall."

"Welcome?" says Roderick, with a sad smile. "Alas, but we cannot! If they see hide or hair of us, they'll be off like startled bucks. We'd just better be hiding ourselves as much as possible. 'Tis the only way for two ghosts to keep their guests satisfied."

"But we can hover about unbeknownst to them," said I. "And maybe we can get joy from their company—listening to their young voices and perhaps directing their tastes in wine."

As the clock struck twelve Roderick leaped between the two combatants, crying, "Desist!" in an agonized voice

"Be careful, Willie," says Roderick very solemn. "You must not forget for a moment that a ghost is a ghost and a laddie a laddie. They're not altogether companionable."

Well, neither Roderick nor I could sleep that day for thinking of the two lads beneath stairs. Although we had been contented enough up to this, now the great ache of loneliness was in our bones. The sight of these two young kinsfolk of

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ours brought up a thousand recollections of our own youth—not nice tales for a Sunday-school, perhaps; but still diverting enough to keep our sides shaking till dusk.

No sooner had night fairly settled in than we flitted out of the attic and down the great stairs to the banquet-hall. The young men by now were seated at table, doing justice to every dish put before them. And what merry lads they were, laughing and joking, with never a care; drinking their wine as gentlemen should and giving no heed to the shadows of Brangler Hall. It was a joy to watch them. Soon Roderick and I were grinning in spite of ourselves; and once, try as I would, the dry humor of my young kinsman was too much for me, and I ventured a laugh.

"What's that?" cried Hector, with a start. "Have they got ghosts hereabouts?"

"So they tell me in the village," said young Dingwall with a grin. "But I'm thinking that noise you heard was just the wind wheezing a bit in the chimney."

"It sounded uncommonly like a laugh," says Hector. "But what did they tell you in the village, Jamie?"

"I was strolling down there this afternoon, and I ran into an odd-looking old chap with a head as bald as a billiard-ball. I hadn't more than passed the time of day with him before he began a wild tale about the ghosts who played billiards at Brangler Hall. It seems he was a servant here when your kinsman, 'Wild Wullie, the Waster,' and my daft Uncle Roderick fought each other with billiard cues. He remembered it all; and it was a rare tale, I can tell you."

"And did he say their ghosts walked?"

"He did that," said Jamie. "It seems that the two of them steal out of the graveyard each night to play billiards. You're in rare luck to own a haunted house."

Hector drained his glass at a swallow and laughed. "I am so," says he. "But it's a pity the lasses did not figure in his tale. I have no aversion for them, be they of this world or the next."

"Nor I," says Jamie. "But we'll just have to be contenting ourselves with what's here. What do you say if we play billiards ourselves tonight and cheat the ghosts of their game?"

"I'm your man!" cried Hector, jumping to his feet. "It's a long time since we've crossed cues, Jamie."

WELL, without any more words on the matter, the two lads strode into the billiard-room, Roderick and I close at their heels. As luck would have it, Hector Campbell picked up my old cue, while Jamie chose his dead uncle's. Then the game started—if you could call it a game, which I much misdoubt.

I give you my word, those two made us blush for them. The way they handled their cues was enough to sicken a man. They had no skill in their fingers and less in their heads. The simplest shot was too much for them. It was all Roderick and I could do to hold our tongues and our tempers in check.

Well, time went drearily on till the stroke of twelve, with never a flash of excitement. They'd shoot and they'd miss, and they'd shoot again till my back teeth were all of an edge. Here they were, the young fools, keeping Roderick and me from our game—and they with no more right to be playing than two scarecrows in a wheat-field. My old fingers were fair itching for the cue.

At last Roderick could stand it no longer. "Willie," he whispered, "this fool game is near driving me daft. Let's you and me take a hand."

"And how may we be doing that?" I murmured. "The way it looks now, these lads will be playing till morning."

"Never worry your head over that, man," says Roderick in my ear. "*They* shouldn't count. It's only by sheer luck that they ever score a point. Eliminate them from the game altogether. Or better yet, you play your kinsman's shots for him by the strength of your mind and I'll just be helping Jamie."

"But will it work, Roderick?"

"At least there's no harm in trying," says he. "Now, concentrate, Willie. It's your shot, for Hector Campbell's juggling the cue between his fingers."

Well, I did as he told me. With the full force of my mind, I planned a very neat shot with a reverse English to it. Around the table the cue ball went and clicked against the others, like a mother kissing her children.

"Well played!" cried Jamie, with a laugh. "I suppose you planned that shot, Hector?"

Young Campbell looked up with a startled face. "I'll not say so much as that," says he. "However, here goes for another try." Once more he bent over the table.

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Instantly I focused my mind on a draw shot which might gather the balls together like sheep in a hurdle. It worked to the queen's taste, and this time Jamie let out an oath of astonishment. But Hector was too amazed to speak at all, and just stared at the balls pop-eyed.

"Go on!" says Jamie, with a wry smile. "The deil's in your finger-bones."

So Hector went on; and before he was through he chalked up a hundred points or more. I was in rare form that night, and I could see that old Roderick was on pins and needles to be playing. At last his chance came. Hector shot before I had time to think, and missed the two other balls entirely.

Jamie had been silent for some time back, but now he spoke up. "Hector Campbell," he says very solemn, "if I had not known you since we were bairns together, I'd be thinking that you'd been laying for bets. As it is, I see there's only one answer for this scandalous conduct—man, you're bewitched."

"It's your turn, Jamie," said my kinsman, putting the best face he could on the matter.

"*My* turn, is it?" cried Jamie, with a laugh. "Well, I'll not profit by it much, I'm thinking. However, here's hoping I get a grip of the deil's tail."

Now, as Jamie got ready to shoot, I could see Roderick's face twitching with excitement. His eyes were glowing like live coals as he bent over his kinsman's shoulder. I could see that he was planning the shot.

Well, it worked admirably. Around the table the cue ball went, taking the cushions at just the right angle, and then *click, click* and the thing was done.

"Well played, Jamie!" cried Hector, clapping his hands. "Say what you will, the deil's not partial. He's come here to lend us both a hand with our game. Shoot again, Jamie."

So Jamie shot again and again with never a miss at all till the day was breaking—shot with a white face of fear and a glance from time to time over his shoulder. Roderick was in fine form. Never had I seen him take such care with each play. Something of the old sweating pride in his skill was written on his furrowed forehead; and there was a twitch of a smile to his lips which I didn't quite fancy.

When the dawn finally broke like a bubble of blood, we flitted up to the attic after seeing the lads to their beds. Roderick was still grinning like a sick cat—a nasty grin which set all my nerves on edge.

"I'm thinking Jamie had the better of your kinsman," says he, just before we closed our eyes for the day.

"You'll not say that tomorrow at this time, Roderick Dingwall!" I cried hotly. "I'll see to it that Hector holds his own!"

"You mean you'll *try*," he says with a grin. "But if I were you, Willie, I would not set my heart on it."

CHAPTER VI

THE SACRIFICE

NOW, the life of a ghost is hard sometimes, and none knows it better than I. Just as long as a body keeps to his own and doesn't go mixing himself up into human affairs, he's as safe and happy as a bug in a rug. But just let him once start being too companionable with flesh and blood, then all hell's let loose.

And the same is true of a mortal. If he once consorts with ghosts by even so much as a prayer to the devil, as likely as not he'll be marked for life like an apple which hangs too long on the tree. Many a man has been ruined by just such a walk with a friendly ghost in the moonlight. Such companionship, if it leads to nothing worse, exposes a human to boils and fits and, some say, a touch of Saint Vitus' dance as well.

At the time, Roderick and I, being inexperienced ghosts knew nothing of all this. We entered into our kinsmen's nightly game of billiards with a vim. But gradually, as time passed, a change came over the players, and over us as well. The lads would no longer chaff each other about a remarkable shot. No; they began to take their new-found skill as a matter of course. And we, for our part, began to feel the old sting of rivalry. Bitter competition crept into the game. We no longer planned their shots for the joy of it, but rather as a blow directed at the other. A deadly feud sprang up between the house of Campbell and the house of Dingwall.

Well, matters went from bad to worse, as the saying is. Soon Roderick and I had no civil words for each other. And the lads were just the same, glowering and glooming at one another across the table, with sarcastic speech from time to time,

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like the sputtering of wet powder. One night, at small provocation—an argument over the careless way young Campbell had of scoring his tally—the four of us would have been at each other's throats if the dawn had not intervened.

When Roderick and I climbed up to our attic that morning, I had a glimmer of reason. What was all this leading to but just murder and suicide again? Here were these two handsome laddies being haunted into their graves by two selfish old ghosts who wouldn't leave them alone at their game! What right had *we* to interfere?—*we* who were supposed to have given up the sinful joys of the flesh.

"Roderick," said I, addressing him for the first time in ten days—"Roderick, all this must stop."

"If you are referring to your kinsman's inability to count correctly," he says very stiffly, "why, I'm agreeing with you in the matter, Mr. Campbell."

"Man, man!" I cried, grasping him by the arm in my excitement, "cannot you see where this game is leading? And the bonnie laddies below stairs! Are you wanting their blood on your head, Roderick Dingwall? Was not mine enough?"

"When a gentleman is owed a debt by another gentleman, he should not be the first to speak of it," says Roderick, still very stately. But for all that, I could see that he had given heed to my words.

"This is no time to stand on your dignity, man!" I cried, pressing my point. "Another night and it may be too late! There was murder in Jamie's eyes but a few moments back!"

"And Hector was showing his teeth like a wildcat," Roderick put in. "But just what are you advising, Willie?"

"That we stop this game for once and for all."

"And how may that be done? The lads are prepared to play it out to the bitter end. Each is determined to vanquish the other."

"But suppose we make the game ridiculous?" I cried, with the germ of an idea taking root in my brain. "Suppose we sicken them of it by not only subtracting our own skill but by making them bungle the most simple shot?"

Roderick was silent for a moment, evidently giving thought to my plan. "It sounds feasible enough, Willie," he said at last. "Man, it should work."

Well, after that, we turned in for the day in a couple of old linen chests, and soon were sleeping peacefully. Little did we think that our plans would go all awry. Two silly old ghosts, we thought we had solved our difficulties.

That night Jamie and Hector sat late over their wine in brooding silence. It was well after eleven before they entered the billiard-room and drew their cues from the rack. They had the look on their faces of men who are determined to do or die.

Jamie won the toss, and I tipped Roderick the wink. He concentrated his mind on a miss to such an extent that his kinsman's cue barely grazed the white ball, moving it but a few inches to one side.

At that, Jamie rapped out an oath. "I miscued!" he cried. "Hell's fire! I forgot to use the chalk!"

"That's a pity," said Hector with a polite sneer. "It's a game that requires thought." He ostentatiously chalked his cue and bent over the table to shoot.

Now, in my turn, I concentrated on a miss, but with more delicacy than Roderick. This time the cue ball ran in the right direction, but I saw to it that it missed the others by a hair.

Hector looked amazed. "I missed!" he muttered. "That's strange! It was an easy shot enough!"

Now it was Jamie's turn to sneer. "I've seen you miss easier shots than that. I guess your streak of luck's about through. Science will tell in the end," says he, and misses a carom which a blindfolded child could have made.

WELL, they bungled shot after shot. But they kept at it just the same. And the longer they played the worse their tempers grew. They were not so much disgusted with the game as they were just disgusted with one another. Roderick and I were at our wits' end. At any moment we expected to see murder done.

"Shall we give them back some of our skill?" Roderick whispered.

"It wouldn't do any good now," I murmured sadly. "I'm afraid we've been consorting too much with the lads."

Hardly had I spoken before the climax came. Hector was taking aim, when Jamie, intent on chalking his cue, accidentally brushed against his arm. At that, my kinsman straightened his back and his eyes flashed sparks.

"I'll trouble you to play like a gentle-

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man, Mr. Dingwall," says he cold as ice. "While you're in the house of a Campbell, you'd best remember that it's not a Campbell's way to stoop to stable-boys' tricks in order to win a game."

At that, Jamie puffed up like a pouter-pigeon. "By Heaven, Mr. Campbell," cried he, "I'll have you know that a Dingwall can learn nothing from a Campbell but just how to lead cattle away in the moonlight."

Now, at this direct blow at the MacGregor blood in his veins, Hector struck Jamie with his open hand across the cheekbone. And Jamie, being a lad of some spirit himself, was at him like a wild man with his cue gripped by the small end.

"My God!" I cried to Roderick, wringing my hands. "Stop them before it's too late. We've driven them to this, just you and I! Man, man, stop them before murder's done!"

"What can I do, Willie?" he wailed, with his face in his hands. "What can I do?"

Just at this moment the clock in the hallway struck bravely above the din of the rattling cues. It was *twelve*—that hour when ghosts can assume their old bodily form.

Hardly had the last stroke died away before Roderick raised his face. On it was a look of brave purpose. A sensitive man he had always been, sensitive to a fault about his personal appearance, but now I read in his eyes a great renunciation.

"What are you about to do, Roderick?" I whispered.

For answer, his hand went up to his stock and began to fumble with the safety pin which held it in place. Unwinding the band of white linen, he leaped to his feet and bounded between the two combatants. Then, assuming his old bodily form, he pointed at the gaping wound in his throat. "Desist!" he cried in an agonized voice. "Look on me, Jamie! I am the spirit of your Uncle Roderick, the suicide. Behold in me, Hector Campbell, the ghost of him who murdered Wild Wullie, the Waster!"

It was a magnificent act. When one considers the supersensitiveness of his nature, one must give Roderick due credit. He had sacrificed his personal vanity to make his appearance effective. At the best, that slit throat of his was an unsightly thing to see.

And if the act were magnificent, so were the results of the act. Instantly the combatants dropped their cues in horror. For a moment or two they stared open-mouthed at the terrible apparition confronting them, and then, uttering wild cries, they fled, bareheaded, out into the starlit night.

"Roderick," I cried, grasping his hand. "I congratulate you!"

But with averted eyes and trembling fingers he was hurriedly replacing his stock, and so gave me no heed. At last he murmured: "Whatever will Jamie be thinking of his own uncle this night?"

It was the one complaint I ever heard out of the man.

ALL this happened a long time ago. Since that night Roderick and I have had Brangler Hall quite to ourselves. Hector and Jamie have never ventured back. In fact, we've seen no mortal face in thirty long years. No doubt, it is better so.

But the rats and spiders give us no peace. Long ago they ended our billiards, tearing the cloth on the table to shreds and weaving their webs from corner to corner. Then there is the dust which half covers the balls, and which only mortal hand may remove. Often, sitting idle in a corner, we have wished that thieving old Tam were still with us.

Roderick is smiling at me as I write. He thinks my literary aspirations are a pose. Like many another kindly ghost, he is perfectly content to sit in the moonlight and twiddle his thumbs. Because he had lived on such intimate terms with me, he cannot understand why I should have an artistic bent. Perhaps these pages will open his eyes. Indeed, Wild Wullie, the Waster, is Wild Wullie the Waster, no more.

Next Month's Novel

THE ELIXIR OF HATE BY GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

The Powerful story of a man who snatched youth from the unwilling hand of Destiny.

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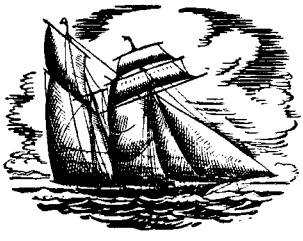
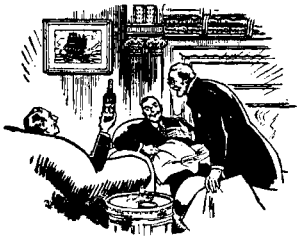
Capt. Turnbull (1806-1900) – like other old salts of his day – rocked a keg of whiskey under his rocker. Its roll recaptured the motion of the wave-tossed ships on which he'd mellowed many a barrel of whiskey.

From Mellow Whiskeys "Rocked in the Keg" came the Idea for Rocking Chair!



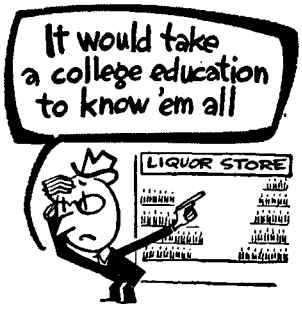


Mr. Boston knows *rocking* mellows a whiskey's flavor. So he achieves Rocking Chair's richness by *controlled agitation in his special blending process.*

Get acquainted with Rocking Chair's smoothness! Buy a bottle – enjoy the mellow taste that made keg-rocked whiskeys so famous. The price is *low!*

85 Proof (80 Proof in some States)
75% Grain Neutral Spirits
Ben-Burk, Inc., Boston, Mass.

OLD MR. BOSTON
BRAND
ROCKING CHAIR
BLENDED WHISKEY



I Went Nuts in Liquor Stores
– by don herold

I used to go crazy in liquor stores, trying to decide which brand to buy. So many brands! The confusion is terrific for the layman liquor layer-inner.

Then a friend told me his system. He said "I've settled on Old Mr. Boston as MY brand –no matter what type of fine liquor I want."

Me–I have too, now.

It turns out that Old Mr. Boston is the one brand name under which you can buy almost every known type of fine liquor. Other big companies make many liquors, but they give them many different names. It's baffling! It's befuddling!

In the Old Mr. Boston line you can buy 30 different liquors, all under the one name, and all easy on the palate and pocketbook.

You know Boston. And you know its fine old reputation for craftsmanship. Well, you can smack a taste of the old town's 300-year-old reputation for quality in every drop of every Mr. Boston product.

So why not try the Old Mr. Herold plan and use Old Mr. Boston "as a handle by which to call your shots" when you want fine liquors?

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The Horla

By GUY de MAUPASSANT

This version, considered by H. P. Lovecraft to stand without a peer among stories of its type, and acclaimed by other authorities as one of the three greatest weird horror stories, was specially translated by our own George Allan England. Mr. England refers to the tale a number of times in "The Elixir of Hate" which is the feature novel of next month's (October) issue of this magazine

I

MAY 8.—How fine a day! I passed all this morning stretched out on the grass in front of my house, under the huge plane-tree which covers and protects it. I love this spot; I love this house, where I have grown to manhood. From my windows I can behold the Seine flowing at the foot of my garden, the great wide Seine, which goes from Rouen to Le Havre, covered with passing boats.

How pleasant it was this morning! About eleven o'clock, a long tow of ships, in charge of a tug, filed past my iron fence. After a couple of English hookers, with their crimson pennants fluttering against the sky, came a magnificent Brazilian three-master, pure white, wonderfully spick-and-span. I saluted her, why, I know not. The sight of her gave me extraordinary pleasure.

May 12.—I've had a touch of fever the last few days. I'm a bit under the weather; perhaps, after all, it's only a slight attack of melancholia.

I wonder whence come these mysterious influences which transform our happiness into dejection, and change our self-confidence into distress? I could almost think the air itself, the invisible air, is full of incomprehensible powers, whose mystic presence casts a spell upon us.

I awake, perhaps, full of life and spirits; I feel like singing. Why? Then I take a walk down along the river; and suddenly, after I've been but a short distance, I come back to the house all upset and wretched, as though some misfortune were awaiting me. Again, why?

Can it be that some slight chill, striking my skin, upsets my nerves and so disturbs my peace of mind? Can it be the form of the clouds, the color of the daylight or the variable hues of things which, through my eyes, distress my thoughts? How can I tell? Everything about us, every object that we see without directly looking at it, everything we touch or meet, must have direct effects upon our organs, our ideas—effects as rapid as they are inexplicably surprising.

This mystery of the invisible—how deep it is! With our miserable little senses we cannot fathom it. We cannot pierce it with our eyes, incapable of seeing the infinitely great as well as the infinitely little, blind to that which is too near, as well as to that which lies too far removed, taking cognizance neither of the inhabitants of a drop of water nor of the inhabitants of a star. Our ears, our taste, our smell deceive us. Ah, if we only had still other organs which could do miracles, how many unknown things we might discover all about us!

May 16.—I'm ill, indeed. And last month I felt so well! I seem to have a fever, an atrocious fever. Shall I rather call it a heated enervation? It pains my soul as deeply as it does my body. Without respite, I feel a frightful sensation as of some threatening danger, an apprehension of some approaching peril, as though death were drawing near. No doubt this

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presentiment is due to some still undiscovered malady, now germinating in my flesh and blood.

May 18.—I have just been to consult my doctor, for sleep has forsaken me. He found my pulse high, pupil dilated, and nerves high-strung, but said none of the symptoms were grave. He prescribed baths and potassium bromid.

May 25.—No change. My condition is truly singular. As evening draws on an incomprehensible uneasiness takes possession of me, as though night hid some terrible danger. I bolt my dinner, and then try to get interested in a book, but I can't understand the words. I can hardly read the letters. Then I pace up and down my sitting-room, oppressed by a confused and irresistible terror—a terror of my bed and of sleep.

About two o'clock in the morning I go up-stairs to my room. No sooner there than I double-lock the door and shoot the bolts. I'm afraid—of what? Until this recent trouble I've never been timid in my life. I open my closets; I listen, listen—what for? Singular that a simple disturbance of the circulation, a slight indisposition, a nerve-irritation or a perturbation of the human mechanism can make the most cheerful man grow melancholy, the bravest a coward!

I go to bed. I wait for sleep as if it were an executioner. Horrified at thought of it, I lie there, my heart throbbing, my body trembling, till the very moment when I fall suddenly into oblivion, as a man might drop into an abyss of stagnant water to drown himself. I no longer feel sleep stealing over me, as I used to—perfidious sleep, hidden near me, waiting to seize me by the head, to shut my eyes and annihilate me!

FOR a long time I sleep—several hours—then a dream grips me. No, no, a nightmare! I feel that I'm in bed asleep. I feel and see this. And I feel also that somebody is drawing near, looking at me, touching me, getting upon the bed.

This person, this Thing, kneels on my breast, clutches my throat between its hands and squeeezes, squeezes with all its might, to strangle me.

I struggle, bound down by that atrocious impotence which paralyzes us in dreams. I try to shout, but cannot. I fight to move. Impossible!

With frenzied efforts, gasping, I labor to turn over, to fling off this Being which crushes and stifles me. I cannot!

Then suddenly I waken, mad with panic, reeking with sweat. I light a candle. I am alone.

After this crisis, which comes on regularly every night, I finally get back to sleep, and slumber calmly till daybreak.

June 2.—Worse. What can be the matter? The bromid is worthless. So are the baths. A little while ago, to tire myself out, though in truth I was already exhausted, I went for a long walk in the forest of Roumare.

At first I thought the fresh air, light and sweet, and odorous of grass and leaves, would put new blood into my veins, new strength into my heart. I started down the big hunting-road, then turned toward La Bouille through a narrow path, between two armies of enormously high trees.

Suddenly a shudder ran through me. It was no ordinary shiver, but a strange and agonized chill.

Uneasy at being alone in the wood, I hastened on, foolishly afraid, stupidly so. I hurried through the profound solitude. All at once it seemed to me that I was being followed, that somebody was dogging my heels, close enough to touch me.

Quickly I turned. I was alone. Behind me I saw only the straight path, high and empty—fearfully empty. In the other direction the path also extended till it faded from sight, just the same. It terrified me.

I shut my eyes. Why? I began to turn round and round, to spin on my heels like a top. I almost fell. When I opened my eyes the trees were dancing, the earth floating. I had to sit down. Then—ah! I no longer knew which way I had come. Strange, strange! Very strange indeed! I no longer knew anything about it. I turned toward the right, and started; and presently found myself once more in the hunting-road.

June 3.—A hideous night! I'm going away for a few weeks. No doubt a little trip will put me in shape again.

July 2.—Back again, and cured. I've had, moreover, a most delightful trip to Mont Saint-Michel. Met an old priest there, who told me some weird legends about invisible beings. Stuff and nonsense! Yet, after all, I've often thought since then of his strange tales.

July 3.—Slept badly. There certainly must be some feverish influence in this

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house, for my coachman suffers from the same disease. When I came home yesterday I noted his peculiar pallor.

"What's the matter with you, Jean?" I asked.

"I can't sleep, sir," he answered. "Night plays me out. Ever since you've been away something has held me like—well, like fate."

The other servants, however, seem all right. But I've a great fear of being attacked once more.

July 4.—Yes, surely I've been attacked again. My former nightmares are all coming back. Last night I plainly felt somebody crouching on me—somebody or something. Its mouth on mine, it drank the breath out from between my lips. Yes, and it gripped my very life right out of my throat, like a monstrous leech.

At last, satiated, it got up. I awoke so racked, broken, and annihilated that I could not move. If this sort of thing goes on, I shall certainly quit the place again.

July 5.—Am I going mad? What happened last night is so incredibly strange that my head whirls when I even think of it!

According to my usual custom of late, I carefully locked my door. Then, feeling a bit thirsty, I drank a half a glass of water. Quite casually I noted at the time that my carafe was full, right up to the glass stopper.

After that I went to bed. I fell into one of my frightful sleeps, out of which I was awakened some two hours after by a still more frightful shock.

Imagine a man who, murdered in deep sleep, wakes up with a knife sticking into his lungs. A man who gasps hideously, all covered with blood. A man who can no longer breathe and is going to die, and cannot understand. Well, that's the way I felt!

Yes, so it seemed to me. But after a while I pulled together again. Then I felt thirsty once more. I lighted a candle and approached the table where my carafe stood. I raised it and tipped it over my glass.

Nothing ran out. It was empty. Totally empty!

AT first I couldn't understand a thing. Then suddenly such a horrible emotion surged over me that I had to sit down; or rather, fell back into a chair.

I leaped up again. I stared all around me. Nothing!

Again I sank down, wild with astonishment and fear in the presence of that transparent crystal. I stared at it with wild eyes, vainly endeavoring to understand. My hands shook. Somebody—or something—had drunk that water!

Who? I? No doubt. Who else could it have been? So then, I'm a sleepwalker? I live that mysterious double life which makes us suspect that two separate beings dwell in each human body? Which makes us think that possibly some foreign intelligence, beyond the reach of our sight or understanding, sometimes animates our captive forms?

Ah, who can understand my abominable suffering? Who can comprehend the emotions of a sane man, wide-awake and full of reason, looking with horror through the glass of a carafe—staring at all that remains of a little water which during his sleep has disappeared? I stayed there till daybreak, afraid to go back to bed.

July 6.—I am going mad! Something drank all the water again last night. Or I did! But was it I? Was it? Who *could* it be? Merciful Heavens, I am going mad! Can no one save me?

July 10.—I have just made some astonishing experiments. I must indeed be a madman. And yet—

On the night of the sixth, before going to bed, I put on my table some wine, milk, water, bread, and strawberries.

Something drank—was it I?—all the water and a little of the milk. The strawberries and wine were not touched.

On the seventh I tried the same test again. Same result.

On the eighth I left out the water and the milk. Nothing was disturbed.

At last, on the ninth, I put back on the table the water and the milk. I took care however, to wrap both carafes with white muslin and tie in the stoppers. Then I smeared my lips, beard, and hands with plumbago, and went to bed.

The usual invincible sleep seized me at last, followed by the horrible awakening. I had not moved at all. Even my bedclothes showed no marks of the plumbago.

I climbed out of bed and ran to the table. The cloths around the carafes were immaculate. Palpitating with fear I snatched off the strings. The water had all been drunk; so had the milk! My God!

I started at once for Paris.

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II

JULY 12.—Paris. I must have been out of my senses the last few days—must have been the plaything of my enervated imagination. That is, unless I really am a somnambulist, or the victim of some obscure psychic suggestion. In any case, it seems as though my mental perturbation had almost reached insanity. But twenty-four hours in Paris have been quite enough to restore my balance.

Yesterday, after divers errands and visits, I finished my evening at the Théâtre-Français. The piece was one by Alexandre Dumas, *fils*, and his quick, powerful wit completed my cure. Surely solitude is dangerous. We must have, all about us, men who think and speak. Too long alone, we people the emptiness with fantoms.

I came home to my hotel, along the boulevards, very gay and high-spirited. There, in the midst of the elbowing crowd I reflected, now without irony, on my terrors and my beliefs of a week ago. Why, then, thought I—I really was convinced that some invisible being dwelt beneath my roof! How weak-brained we are, to be sure; how quickly we go astray as soon as any little incomprehensible fact turns up! Rather than dismiss it by saying: "I don't understand, simply because the cause is beyond me," we immediately conjure up frightful mysteries and supernatural powers.

July 30.—Back home again. Everything all right. Still, I can't help thinking of what I heard in Paris a week ago.

I was dining one day with Mme. Sable, my cousin. There was a little party of guests. Dr. Parent was among them. You know Parent, of course, the famous expert in nervous diseases and in those extraordinary phenomena induced by hypnotism and suggestion. He told us about the striking results produced by English scientists and by the doctors of the Nancy School. Among other remarks I recall this one:

"We are now on the point of discovering one of nature's most profound secrets—yes, one of the very most important secrets in the world. Ever since man has been thinking at all, he has felt the contact of a mystery which his coarse, imperfect senses have not been able to penetrate. He has tried to bolster up the impotence of his physical being by the efforts of his intelligence.

"While that intelligence still remained rudimentary, the invisible phenomena of nature took various stupid and frightful forms. Hence, of course, arose popular belief in the supernatural legends of wandering spirits, fairies, gnomes, ghosts—even the legend of God itself. No truer words were ever uttered than those of Voltaire: 'God created man in his own image, and man has liberally returned the compliment!' "

August 2.—Nothing new. Magnificent weather. I pass my time watching the Seine flow by.

August 4.—Quarrels among my servants. They claim somebody's breaking glassware in the cupboards, at night. The valet accuses the cook, who accuses the maid, who accuses the other two. Who's really to blame? It would take a cleverer fellow than I to say.

August 6.—This time I'm not mad! I've seen something—I've seen—*seen!* No more doubt about it, for I've seen it! Fear has struck into my very marrow. I have seen it!

About two o'clock I was walking in my rose-garden. The sun was shining bright. I was going through the path where grow the autumn roses, now beginning to bloom.

Just as I was stopping to look at a *géant des batailles* with three magnificent blossoms, I saw—distinctly saw—the stalk of one of these blossoms bend, as though an invisible hand had twisted it. I saw it break, as if that hand had plucked it! Then the flower swung upward, following a curve such as would be made by a hand carrying it toward a face. It stayed there a moment, hanging alone and motionless in the transparent air, a frightful crimson blot hardly three paces from my eyes.

Wild with panic, I flung myself forward to snatch it. I found nothing; it had vanished. Then I was seized with a furious rage against myself, for a reasonable man isn't permitted to have any such hallucinations as that.

But was it an hallucination? I went back to look at the stalk and found it at once, freshly broken, between the other two still whole.

Mind and soul completely routed, I returned to the house. I am certain now—as sure as I am that day follows night—some invisible Being exists near me. A Being which lives on milk and water, which can touch and handle and

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move material objects; a Being, therefore, of some material nature itself, though imperceptible to our senses. A Being, like myself, dwelling beneath my roof. . . .

AUGUST 7.—Slept quietly. *He* drank the water from my carafe, but did not trouble my repose.

I ask myself if I really am insane. Just now, walking in the clear sunshine along the river-bank, doubts began to invade my reason—no longer vague doubts and fears such as I had felt up till now, but absolute, precise, and vivid. I have seen madmen myself. I have known some to remain perfectly rational and lucid, extraordinarily so, regarding the everyday matters of life. Only one point has marked them as mad. They could talk about everything with great clearness, with depth and subtlety; then all at once, verging the shoals of their delusion, they burst their bonds, went shipwrecked and sank in that frightful, furious ocean full of lashing waves, fogs, and tempests which we call "madness."

I should indeed believe myself insane, hopelessly mad, were I not aware of these phenomena; were I not wholly informed about my own condition; did I not plumb my own vagaries and analyze them with entire lucidity. It seems, therefore, that I am merely a man with an hallucination, about which I can reason.

Some unknown disturbance must have taken place in my brain—one of those disturbances which psychologists today attempt to note and study. This disturbance has probably created a deep fissure in my mind, in the logic and the order of my ideas. Such phenomena take place in those dreams which lead us through the most improbable phantasmagorias, without surprising us at all, for the simple reason that our controlling apparatus, our means of verification, have abdicated, at the same time that our imaginative faculties remain awake and active.

May it not be that one of the imperceptible keys of the mental instrument is paralyzed? After certain incidents, men sometimes lose all memory of proper names, or of verbs, or of numbers—again, merely of dates, and so on. The localization of every category of ideas can be completely proved. So then, why should I wonder if the simple faculty of controlling the unreality of certain illusions has just now gone astray?

Following the water's edge, I thought of all this. The sun was flooding the river with radiance, making the earth delicious, filling me with love of life, love for the swallows, which delighted my eyes with their agility, love for the grass, which pleased my ears with its soft rustling.

Soon, however, a gradual uneasiness inexplicably took possession of me. Some force, some occult power, it seemed, filled me, stopped me, forbade me to go farther, called me back. I felt the same painful need of going home again which sometimes you may have noticed when you have perhaps left a sick person whom you love; when you feel a presentiment that the malady is growing worse.

So in spite of myself I came back, positive that I should find some bad news at home, some letter or telegram. There was nothing. This surprised me, made me more uneasy than as if I had some new and fantastic vision.

August 8.—Last evening was frightful. He no longer makes himself manifest, but I feel him near me, spying on me, staring at me, dominating me—more horrible, now that he hides himself, than when making his presence, his invisible and constant presence, known by supernatural phenomena.

I slept at last, however.

August 9—11.—Nothing, but I am still alarmed. What may happen to-morrow? I can't stay here, with my soul full of this thought, this fear. I'm going away.

August 12, ten o'clock in the evening.—I've been wanting to get away all day long, but I haven't been able. I've been wanting to do this easy little act—to go out—get into my carriage—start for Rouen. I've been held back! How?

August 13.—When certain diseases attack us, every spring of physical energy seems broken, all our strength is set at naught, our muscles are relaxed, our bones soft as flesh, our flesh like water. I seem to be experiencing the same thing in my moral nature. It is strange and most depressing. I have no longer any force, courage, or dominion over myself. No power even to set my will at work. I cannot desire anything. Something desires, something wills for me, and I obey.

August 14.—I am lost! Some one possesses and governs my soul! Some one orders all my deeds, every move I make, each thought! I am no longer anybody; I am a slave, terrified at everything I do.

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Suppose I want to leave the house. I cannot. *He* does not wish me to; so I stay in, terrified and trembling, sitting right here in the armchair where he holds me. I merely want to get up, so as to think myself still partly my own master. Impossible! I am riveted to my seat. My chair is fixed to the floor. No human force could lift us!

Then, all at once I must, *must,* MUST go out into the garden and gather strawberries and eat them. And I go. I gather strawberries; I eat. Oh, my God! My God! Is there a God? If there be any, deliver me! Save me! Help me! Pardon! Pity, mercy on me! What anguish, what horror, what infernal torment.

August 15.—He who governs and controls me, who, or what can it be? Who is this invisible creature, this unknown wanderer of an unknown race? So, then, the Invisible Folk do really exist? If so, why have they never before, since the beginning of the world, made themselves manifest, as they do now to me? Never have I read anything like what is now taking place here in my house. Oh, if I could only leave it, escape, flee and never come back again! I might be saved then; but I cannot go.

August 16.—For two whole hours to-day I was able to get clear. I seemed like a prisoner who finds the cell-door accidentally open. Suddenly I felt that I was free, that he was far away. I ordered the horses harnessed at once, and got as far as Rouen. Ah, what a joy that was to me, thus to be able to command: "Drive to Rouen!" and to be obeyed!

I stopped at the library, and took out Dr. Hermann Herestauss's great treatise on "The Unknown Inhabitants of the Ancient and Modern World."

When I got back into my carriage I meant to order: "To the railway station!" But instead I cried—in so loud a voice that the passers-by turned round—"Home again!" And then I fell back, mad with anguish, on the carriage-seat. *He* had found me, he had seized me again!

AUGUST 17.—What a night! What a night! And yet it seems to me I should perhaps rejoice. I read until one o'clock in the morning, this remarkable work of Dr. Herestauss, describing the origin, power, and dominion of all the invisible beings which man has conceived or really do prowl about him.

But not one of these in any way resembles the thing that haunts me. It almost seems as though man has been for ages foreseeing and fearing some new creature, stronger than he, which is to be his successor in this world; as though man, feeling this creature near at hand, and unable to determine the nature of this master-being, has created in terror the whole tribe of occult existences and fear-born fantoms.

So, having read till one o'clock, I went and sat near my open window to cool my face and freshen my thoughts with the gentle night-wind.

It was a fine, balmy night. How I should have enjoyed it, once upon a time! No moon. The stars danced, sparkling, in the remote blackness of the sky. What forms, what living things, what plants and animals exist there? thought I. Who dwells upon those worlds? Do the inhabitants of those unknown universes know more than we? What powers have they, superior to ours? What do they see which we cannot? Might not one of them, some day passing through space, appear upon this earth to conquer it, as the Normans once crossed the Channel to subjugate a weaker folk?

We are so infirm, we men, so unarmed and ignorant, so small, down here on this lump of mud which turns, surrounded with its film of water!

Thus I gradually dropped off to sleep, dreaming there in the cool night-breeze.

Well, having slept about three-quarters of an hour, I suddenly reopened my eyes without moving at all. Some strange, confused emotion had awakened me. At first I saw nothing. Then all at once it seemed to me that a page of the book which still lay open on my table had just turned over all by itself. No draft had entered the window. Surprised, I waited.

At the end of some four minutes, I saw, *saw*—yes, with my own eyes *saw* another page rise and go over, as if a finger had turned it! My chair, before the book, was empty. But I understood that *he* was there, sitting and reading as I had done.

With one furious leap, the leap of a beast in mad revolt, I rushed across the room to seize *him,* to strangle and to kill this monster.

But before I could reach him, his chair whirled backward as though he had fled from me. The table rocked. The lamp crashed over and went out. My window banged shut as though some evil-doer

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had flung himself out into the night.

So then, he fled from me? He was afraid? He, afraid of *me?*

Why, then—to-morrow, or later—some day—I may be able to get my grip on him and crush him to earth? Do not even dogs sometimes tear and kill their masters?

August 18.—All day long I've been reflecting. Ah, yes, I'm going to obey him now, follow his orders, do his will, humble myself and be submissive, cowardly and cringing. He's the stronger. But some time—

III

AUGUST 19.—I know! I know all! I have just read in the *Scientific World* this:

> Some rather singular news has reached us from Rio de Janeiro. A curious epidemic of insanity, similar to those contagious dementias which afflicted the people of medieval Europe, is now spreading over the province of San Paulo. The terrified inhabitants are leaving their homes, deserting their villages, and abandoning their farms. They claim to be pursued, possessed, and driven like human cattle by certain invisible though tangible creatures, by a kind of vampire. These vampires, they say, feed on their lives during sleep, and drink water and milk, without seeming to touch any other food.
>
> Professor Don Pedro Henriquez, accompanied by several physicians has set out for San Paulo, to study the origins and the manifestations of this astonishing malady. They intend to present to the government such measures as shall seem most likely to restore reason to this afflicted population.

Ah! I remember the handsome Brazilian three-master which passed up the Seine the eighth of last May! I thought it so fine, so white and beautiful! *He,* this Being, must have been aboard, on his way from Brazil, the home of his accursed race. He must have seen me, seen my white house, and taken a fancy to it. He must have sprung from the ship to the shore. Great God!

Now I know, I foresee it. The supremacy of man is at an end.

He has come at last. He whom primitive man first feared in vague alarms. He whom the restless priests have tried to exorcise, whom sorcerers have in vain endeavored to call up at pitch-black midnight. He to whom we, the transitory masters of this world, have given a thousand fanciful or monstrous forms.

Of late, men have begun to foresee him more clearly. Mesmer guessed his existence, and physicians for some ten years or more have known the exact nature of his power, even before he himself had begun to exercise it. They have been using this weapon of the New Master, the domination of a mysterious will over the enslaved human soul. They have called it magnetism, hypnotism, and suggestion. I have seen them amusing themselves like rash children with this horrible power! Wo upon us! Wo on mankind!

For he has come at last, the—the—how shall I name him? I seem to hear him crying his name to me; yet I cannot make it out. The— Yes, he *is* shouting it! I listen. What? Once more? The—Horla! Ah, I heard it, that time! It is he, the *Horla!* He has come!

Ah! The vulture eats the dove. The wolf devours the sheep. The lion tears the sharp-horned buffalo. Man has killed the lion with arrow, sword, and powder. But the Horla is going to make out of man what we have made of the horse, the ox. He will make us his chattels, his slaves, his food, through the mere power of his will. Wo unto us!

Even an animal may at times, however, rebel and slay its tormentor. I, too, will—can—but how? First I must know this Thing, touch it, see it!

I thought along still further. My human sight is so imperfect that it cannot even distinguish solid bodies, if these happen to be transparent. Let a spotless mirror stand in my path, and I am very likely to be misled by my vision, to be sent crashing into the glass, as a bird caught in a room dashes its brains out against the panes.

A thousand things deceive our sight. Why should we wonder, then, if it cannot perceive some new body, entirely nonresistant to light?

A new Being? Why not? Surely, it had to come! For why should *we* be the last? You say we cannot discover it? Very well; that is because of its more perfect nature, its body finer, and more complete than ours—ours so weak, so clumsily conceived, encumbered with always-tired organs. Finer than ours, which live like any animal or plant, painfully fed on air and grass and flesh—ours, the mere outline-sketch of a being

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which might perhaps in time become intelligent and superb.

There are, after all, so few creatures in the world, from the oyster right up to man, why should there not be one more late-comer? Why not, if the period has been completed which marks off the appearance of each new species? How poor, mean, and miserable everything is! Miserly given, dryly invented and clumsily built! Ah! The elephant! The hippopotamus! What grace! What elegance in the camel!

Now, consider the butterfly, a flitting flower! I dream of one which shall be as vast as a hundred universes, with wings, color, movement, and beauty which I cannot even imagine. Ah! I behold it. It goes from star to star, refreshing and perfuming them, with the light, harmonious breath of its flight! And, in ecstatic ravishment, the people up yonder watch it pass!

EH? What's the matter with me? Oh, it's the Horla, the Horla which is haunting me, which makes me think such insane thoughts. He is inside of me. He is becoming my soul. I'll kill him!

August 19.—I certainly will kill him. For I have seen him!

Yes. . . . Last night I was sitting at my table. I pretended to be writing with great interest. Well I knew that he would come and wander round me, very close, so close that I might possibly touch or even seize him. And after that? Ah, after that I should become a madman! My hands, my knees, my very forehead itself, my teeth and all would strangle and crush and bite and rend him!

With my whole being overexcited, I lay in wait.

I had lighted my two lamps, as well as the eight candles on the mantel, as if perhaps I might be able to discover him in all that radiance.

Right opposite me stood my bed; an old oak bed with tall posts. At the right my fireplace. At the left the door. After having left it open a long time, so as to attract him in, I had carefully closed it. Behind me was a very high clothes-press, with a full-length mirror. This I used every day to dress by, and to shave in front of.

Well, I pretended to be writing, in order to deceive him. For he, too, was spying on me. Suddenly I felt, I was positive that he was reading over my shoulder, that he was there, almost brushing my ear.

I jumped up, my hands outstretched. I whirled about so quickly that I almost fell. Ah! What? The room was almost as light as day. And yet I couldn't see myself in my mirror!

The glass was empty, clear, deep, and full of luminosity. No reflection appeared therein! Yet I was standing directly in front of it! I saw the great mirror perfectly limpid from top to bottom. And with horror-stricken eyes I stared at it. I dared not go forward; I dared make no slightest movement. Well did I know the Thing was there; yet I feared, too, that he would yet escape me, he whose imperceptible body had cut off my reflection.

Fear numbed me. Then, suddenly I began to see myself as in a fog, way at the back of the mirror—as in a stream of troubled waters. It seemed to me this water was flowing from left to right, letting my image show more and more clearly every instant. It reminded me of an eclipse passing by. The object which concealed my reflection seemed to possess no definite outlines, but rather a sort of transparent opacity, which gradually grew clear.

At last I could see myself completely; I knew that he was gone.

So then, I had caught a glimpse of him! The terror of it makes me shudder yet.

August 20.—Kill him? But how? I cannot catch him! Poison? He would see me mixing it with the water. And, moreover, would our poisons have any effect on his impalpable structure? No, no. But then, how?

August 21.—I've had a locksmith come down from Rouen. At my order he has made iron shutters for my room. He is also going to make me an iron door. I'll have to pass for a coward. But what does that matter?

SEPTEMBER 10.—I am at Rouen, in the Hotel Continental. I've done it! It's all over! But—is he dead? I'm in a frightful state with what I've seen.

Yesterday the locksmith finished putting on the iron blinds and the door. I left everything wide open till midnight, even though it began to grow cold.

Suddenly I felt that he was there. A joy, an insane joy, took hold of me. I

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got up slowly and paced back and forth a long time, so that he should suspect nothing. Then, quite carelessly, I took off my boots and put on my slippers.

I then shut and locked my iron shutters, chained them, and put the key in my pocket. I quietly stepped over to the door and closed that also.

Suddenly I knew he was moving uneasily around me, that now he too was afraid, and that he was commanding me to open the door. I almost gave in. But I resisted. I set my back against the door; then I opened it just enough to let myself out. Backward I retreated. I knew he could not have got out at the same time. Ha! I locked him in, all, all alone! What joy! I had him—at last I had him!

I ran down-stairs. In the *salon,* directly under my room, I seized both lamps. I flung oil over the carpet, upon the furniture, everywhere. I set fire to it. And then, I ran away—after having securely locked the big front door.

Down into the garden I ran. I hid in a clump of laurel at the lower end. How long the waiting seemed! Everything remained dark, motionless and still. No breeze; not a single star; mountains of clouds which could hardly be made out, yet weighed so heavily—so heavily—upon my soul!

Watching the house, I waited. How long it seemed! I had already made up my mind that the fire had gone out or had been extinguished by *him,* when suddenly one of the lower windows burst outward with the pressure of the conflagration. A flame, a great red and yellow flame, long, soft, and caressing, licked up the wall even to the roof.

A dull light spread among the trees, in the branches, in the leaves. A shudder of fear spread also. The birds awakened. A dog began to howl. It seemed almost as though the day were breaking.

Presently two other windows crashed out. I saw that the whole lower portion of my home was nothing but a frightful brazier. But—ah, what?—a cry, a horrible, high-pitched, rending cry rent the night—the cry of a woman! Two attic windows were flung open!

I had forgotten my servants!

I saw their fear-maddened faces, their arms which they waved in agony!

Then, wild with horror, I rushed away toward the village, shrieking "Help! Fire! Fire!" I met people already coming. With them I ran back, to see the end of the catastrophe.

Now the house was nothing save a hideous yet magnificent pyre, a monstrous pyre which lit up the whole countryside, a pyre wherein human creatures were being consumed—where he, he too, my prisoner, the New Being, the New Master, was burning as well, he the Horla! . . .

Suddenly the whole roof fell in between the walls. A volcano of flames shot to the sky.

Through the gaping open windows I watched this hell of incandescence. I thought: "*He* is there in that furnace, dead!" . . .

Perhaps. His body dead? That body which did not impede the light, could it be destroyed by any means fatal to us?

And—if he were not dead? Maybe time alone has power over this frightful Invisible Being!

After man, the Horla!

No, no, he is not dead! I know he still lives. So then—I must—what?—must kill—myself! . . .

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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, 280 Broadway, New York City.

ANOTHER NEW READER!

I can't resist the temptation to tell you how pleased I am with your magazine. I have only two issues; I've somehow missed F.F.M. in the piles of other S-F and fantasy mags currently flooding the market. However, you are assured of me being a steady reader henceforth.

I hope I am not imposing on you too much, but I would like to ask a favor of you. I just recently started a collection of S-F and fantasy books. I have had a great deal of trouble in finding them except a few in second-hand bookstores. I realize that some of the fans can help me if they care to drop a line of advice.

Back to F.F.M. You have the best fantasy mag on the market, and save for one possible exception, the *only* true fantasy magazine.

Another new reader,

CERAD OLIVER

3956 LEDGEWOOD,
CINCINNATI, OHIO

ABOUT OUR ARTISTS

Dear Editor:

F.F.M. is almost too excellent now to allow for much further improvement . . . combining fine illustrations and a very attractive cover with trimmed edges and a good grade of paper. And that, to me at least, makes the contents almost doubly attractive—as if the quality of the stories could possibly be that much increased!

Considering the art work in the July issue, the Finlay-Paul combine turns in a performance that exceeds even their usual superbness. Do you wield some mysterious, mighty power of life-or-death over them, culled from bits of wisdom of innumerable fantasies, that they consistently do their best work for you? Finlay's cover is undoubtedly one of his best, if not the best, to date; a really beautiful piece.

And his interior pix on pp. 79 and 89 are particularly wonderful. Not to neglect the other half of the combine, Paul, his drawings are also quite as good, thorough and excellent as ever.

Incidentally, thanks for the relatively large number of illustrations . . . they set off the printed matter nicely.

"Polaris—of the Snows," strangely enough, proved somewhat of a disappointment for me, being mainly an adventure yarn and lacking enough of the elements of fantasy. However, it is a fine bit of writing—good enough for me to want to see the rest of the trilogy. "Serapion," too, was a first-grade tale, although the ending was a bit of a let-down I thought that Stevens could have developed the struggle between Barbour and Serapion more fully than he did.

Before closing, I can't resist listing the reprints I'd like to see. The remaining Merritt-tales (spread out over a period of time, of course, to make 'em last), plus a re-reprint of "The Moon Pool" in complete form; the rest of the Giesy and Stilson trilogies; and anything else you consider to be good by Hall, England, Flint, Garret Smith, and Cummings. And, if you could possibly dig one up, or buy one somewhere, a straight or heavy science-fiction classic . . . mainly for variety and contrast.

BILL STOY

140-92 BURDEN CRESCENT,
JAMAICA, N. Y.

REPORT ON JULY ISSUE

Just got the July F.F.M. It's superb!

"Polaris—of the Snows" was excellent. I'm looking forward to the rest of this trilogy.

How's about giving us the second of the "Palos" trilogy, "Mouthpiece of Zitu"?

I haven't as yet read "Serapion," but if the story is one half as good as the illustrations are, I'll be satisfied.

As for reprints, you seem to know just what is wanted. However, I wouldn't reprint stories from the early Amazing Stories, such as the "Skylark's," "Invaders from the Infinite," etc. etc. because copies of the magazines in which they were published are fairly easy to get. I would be in favor of the publishing of the "Moon Pool" series in one issue.

How about trying some other illustrators along with Paul and Finlay? I would suggest Rogers for covers, stf., that is. Keep Finlay for fantasy. Cartier is very good, both on the cover and the interior. J. Allen St. John might be good for any story with action in it, as the Tarzan series (which he illustrated).

Thanks for the trimmed edges, monthly publication, and more pages.

JULES L. LAZAR

52 ALLEN ST.,
BOSTON, MASS.

P.S. By the way, if there are any stf. readers living in or around Boston that would like to join an active fan club, The Strangers Club, get in touch with me at the above address, or Art Widner Jr., 25 Arnold St., Quincy, for particulars.

ANOTHER FANTASY FEMME

I received my latest issue of F.F.M. (July) and have finished it already. I am simply tickled that you are publishing monthly now. The hardest thing I ever had to do was wait for those bi-monthlies.

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I see that my subscription expires next issue. A new one will be immediately forthcoming.

Please rush the rest of the Polaris stories. And another thing; the guy that left Doggo and Quivven in that awful predicament, I would like personally to take to account. You tell him to send us another Radio story and rescue these poor creatures, pronto.

I would like to say a few words about the back issues I have read. I have only been an F.F.M. fan for about two years and I have missed a lot of your works. Of the stories I have read I liked the "Darkness and Dawn" trilogy best. Then I like "Palos of the Dog Star Pack." Would like the sequel soon.

"The Metal Monster" is about the last word in fantasy. The descriptions and beauty of it left me holding my breath. The illustrations for "The Snake Mother" and "The Dwellers in the Mirage"—well, there's nothing I can say, but if you let anything but Uncle Sam get V. Finlay away from you, I will find you and—

All this that I am saying I know has been said before but I felt I had to say my bit, too.

Please have more of Merritt's stories. I am fascinated with his works. I am looking for back issues. Will some of the readers have pity on me and let me buy some?

Your friend forever,

ESTHER ABERNATHY

320 S. DESPLAINES ST.,
JOLIET, ILL.

CAN YOU HELP?

I am a constant reader of your swell magazine of which, I am proud to say, I have every copy. I'm certainly glad to see that you have decided to publish it monthly and even that's too long to wait.

I wonder if either you or possibly some of the readers could help me on this question? I'd like to know if I can get a list of hard cover books dealing with the subject of Fantasy? And, also, if there is a simple way of binding magazines?

I would appreciate any answers to these problems. Congratulations on the best magazine printed to-day.

JOHN O'CONNOR

1248 PROSPECT PL.,
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

FAN MAG NEWS

You've seen by this time that the revived *California Mercury* is not a mere flash in the pan. After several months of ill health and semi-retirement from fandom, I now feel in a position to resume steady publication which I am doing.

With the next issue I adopt the former eight pages each month. Along with this policy, and in getting the mimeograph put in better shape (witness the latest issue which is something of a mess), future issues will feature all the colors of the spectrum in presenting modern headings and flashy displays.

Probably you need no reminder to say that F.F.M. has picked up a lot with the latest issues. What's this about Merrittales? Is he to do some new ones? It's certainly a true hope that he is to turn out some of his vivid stories.

Finlay is about the tops these days, yes indeed, as he always has been. Paul has turned in some superior work, too.

Your stfriend,

JOE FORTIER

1836 39TH AVE.,
OAKLAND, CALIF.

HOW ABOUT IT, READERS?

I wish you had space to run a Poet's Page—there is a good bit of really good fantasy poetry being written today. I liked that Palos item you ran a few issues back. Here is one for you—

Yu-Atlanchi

Land of Suarra and Graydon,
Long hidden among the Andes,
Slumbering for ages, and calm,
With Adana dreaming and tired,
And the Lords alone on their thrones.

(But like the volcano that sleeps,
Is Nimir, who schemes in the Face.)

'Tis already written and wrought,
But Malik keeps—he cannot turn,
Or read the pages of the Book . . .
These things in action must be done,
Dark Nimir's evil web be spun.

(The Dark One's shadow leaps to life,
His taunting laughter wakes the strife!)

The witchland of the Olden Race,
Is doomed once more to turmoiled hell;
The blight of battle strikes and stings,
First Lantlu's pack, then Huon's men,
While Graydon watches fearfully.

(The Dark One plays his final card . . .
His final card? But was it so!)

Peace returns to the mystic land,
Peace—and a new life to its veins;
Now Death and Life are present there,
And soothed, Adana can sleep sound,
While Graydon plans—and Life grows strong!

(But is Nimir done—forever?
Will the Dark Lord ne'er rise again?)

"PTAREK."

JULY A STAR ISSUE

I got my July F.F.M. a short time ago. It was really a star issue: the cover and each of the many inside drawings were excellent. Ditto for the two tales and the Merritt letter.

I'm glad to see "Creep, Shadow!" coming up.

Especially pleasing to my heart is the knowledge that "Into the Infinite" is on its

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way. Perhaps you could publish it in four parts. Start the story as soon as possible.

I see from Mr. Mebane's letter that "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" is planned to be printed complete in an issue. I am not in favor of such a move for the simple reason that I always have issues 1 to 7 of F.F.M. on hand. If I wish to re-read the story, there it is! If you are determined to do it, however, make up a special issue and use it as you did the Finlay Drawings Portfolio.

Coming back to Mr. Mebane's letter, I read his criticisms of "The Metal Monster." Now I must admit that when I first read this Merrittale I immediately got lost in a maze of super-astounding fantasy and never quite extricated myself. Mr. Mebane's letter (and others' letters) persuaded me to try "F.F.M." once more. I did this and found that my opinion of the story was very different from what it had been. The story was indeed well-told and interesting. How many writers could have done such a good job with such a fantastic theme as did Mr. Merritt?

"The Radio Planet" was very good, and in my opinion, the best so far printed of the Radio Series.

"Burn, Witch, Burn!" was wonderful. It fully lived up to my expectations. The cover and interior illustrations were very good.

"Beyond the Pole" was quite good, though not as good as "The Ship of Silent Men." The Cummings story was not nearly as good as the first in the "Crimes of the Year 2000" series. I did not care for "Fishhead."

Keep up the flow of Francis Stevens stories. Here is an author who is really good. "Serapion" was not only very good, but unusual. What a haunting story! I read it a few times after purchasing the issue; "Serapion" was better each time. "Polaris" was good; publish the sequel quickly!

In concluding the letter, I ask you to use a few Garrett Serviss. H. E. Flint tales and "The Man Who Mastered Time."

Your magazine right now is excellent—keep it so.

BEN INDICK.

45 PERSHING AVE.,
ELIZABETH, N. J.

CORRECTION

You made a slight error in my address in your July issue. I live in Wilson, North Carolina not in California as you stated. I'm sure the state of California has already sued F.F.M. for slander and defamation of character.

Now for the July issue. "Serapion" is truly a classic. And Finlay's drawings are simply out of this world. A more magnificent piece of fantasy could hardly be written by Merritt, the master, himself.

"Polaris—of the Snows" is a good adventure yarn, but has little fantasy. I much prefer "Serapion."

BANKS MEBAN.

P. O. BOX 1139,
WILSON, NORTH CAROLINA

BACK ISSUE OFFER

Your readers may be interested to know that I have most of the back issues for which they ask so often of F.F.M. and F.N. I shall be glad to furnish a list of these and state what I consider their value to be, for anyone who writes to me.

JULIUS UNGER.

1702 DAHILL RD.,
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

HOW ABOUT THIS, FANS?

Most of the stories I've read in F.F.M. I've enjoyed immensely, with the possible exception of a few like "Crimes of the Year 2000." As you've been told before, F.F.M. has been doing a great service to fantasy fans in reprinting the old stories.

"Beyond the Pole," was the best in some time. That story had atmosphere and suspense worked in beautifully.

I remember reading in one copy of F.F.M. the letter section, in which some fan requested that you reprint "The Ark of Fire," a serial that ran in the American Weekly in 1938.

Surely a few fantasy fans read this serial, in the spring of '38. It was an out-and-out science fiction story, given a prominent place. I wasn't in fandom at that time . . . but surely, a few of you must have read it!

The story was illustrated by Virgil Finlay, came out for eight consecutive weeks, and had twenty-eight chapters. The writing style is particularly vivid and the verbs and adjectives were used very effectively. Anyway, it's my favorite story, by a long way, and for years I've had the plans in mind of making a picture of it. If any reader of F.F.M. who read and enjoyed this story will write me, I'll try to form some sort of an organization composed especially of fans who want to boost "The Ark of Fire" and then—who knows?

In conclusion, this yarn would make a big hit in F.F.M. I'm the No. 1 "Ark of Fire Bug" as Larry Shaw of Schenectady, New York, so aptly expresses it.

How about this, readers?

RAYMOND WASHINGTON, JR.
(THE ARK OF FIRE BUG)

LIVE OAK, FLORIDA

OLD STORIES BEST

Recently a popular fantasy and science-fiction mag stated in response to a reader's request for reprints, that the "old" stories are not as good as those of today. Well, that made me sit up and take notice! In my opinion the reprints which F.F.M. and F.N. have published are superior to today's stories, which are mostly interplanetary and future tales.

The tales in F.F.M. and F.N. have been superb. Keep up the good work!

I am especially pleased to see F.F.M. go monthly with trimmed edges. "The Readers' Viewpoint" should be enlarged.

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The stories you have published are truly the cream of the crop.

Lately you've given us less of the authors whose material you used to publish always, such as Cummings, Flint, Hall, and a few others. Give us more of them soon.

"Burn, Witch, Burn!" was an enthralling tale, although Merritt did not make use of his wonderful descriptions.

Finlay's work is grand.

"The Blind Spot" is the best story I've ever read. It's a shame two such wonderful authors didn't live to print a third story to the satisfaction of so many readers.

Some stories I'd like to see soon are: "Minos of Sardanes." "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian." "Mouthpiece of Zitu," "Jason, Son of Jason," more of Cummings, Hall, Flint, England, Merritt, and so many others.

Where is the long awaited "Ship of Ishtar"?

I shall never forget the day I first came upon F.F.M. I was looking around a second-hand book store for an interesting book when I sighted the May-June 1940 issue. I purchased it for a measly nickel and after reading it obtained all back issues.

I shall be glad to supply any back issues of F.F.M. or F.N. on fair terms, so readers, let me know which issues you want.

MAURICE RICHTER.

850 GERARD AVE.,
THE BRONX, N. Y.

BACK ISSUES WANTED

I have subscribed to FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES since its first issue and was a subscriber of FANTASTIC NOVELS while it was being published. I am, to put it mildly, an ardent admirer of both these magazines. So, you can imagine my dismay when through an accident my complete file of back numbers were thrown away.

I would like to re-obtain all issues prior to the July '42 publication and all issues of the FANTASTIC NOVELS mag. Can you supply me or put me in touch with someone who can? If not, will you please print this in The Readers' Viewpoint?

My fellow readers might be interested in the fact that I have a complete file, with the exception of several copies, of the Argosy Magazine. This collection extends from 1920 to 1940, and includes most of A. Merritt's masterpieces. I also have several copies of the old "All-Story Cavalier" and two books "The Moon Pool" and "Creep, Shadow!" by Merritt. I would be willing to sell or trade all the items mentioned.

WILLIAM R. BRIGGS.

122 FRONT ST.,
RIPLEY, OHIO.

LOVECRAFT FAN

I have been reading your magazine for several issues now, and am very pleased to find a magazine of its kind on the market where there is really a novel, instead of a 20 page thriller.

Your Readers' Viewpoint is very interesting. There, I can find varied assortments of views on the stories, and sometimes get a new slant on a story that I didn't quite see before.

I read alternately almost all of the popular fantastic type of fiction on the market, but from what I have seen in the few issues of your magazine I've had, it is going to be a must for me in the future. I am glad to see it on a monthly basis now, and I hope you never, never run a serial.

Some day, possibly you may use some of the old Lovecraft classics. I believe that in time Lovecraft will be a model for all fantastic fiction writers to follow, if he isn't already. Your illustrations are excellent, though sometimes not exactly true to the story, as I build the picture in my mind. But of course no two people ever see green as the same color . . . so . . .

Good luck, and I thought you might like to know that your magazine is rather popular with a number of my friends here in the Coast Guard. I always pass my magazine along.

CHARLES A. MYERS, RMIC, U.S.C.G.
239 FOREST ST.,
RIDGEWOOD PARK,
WATERFORD, CONN.

IT MUST BE GOOD!

Glancing through the "Readers' Viewpoint" department of the July issue of F.F.M., I was greatly astonished to note the number of feminine fans reading your magazine. Heretofore, I've had the notion that members of the opposite sex (with a few exceptions of course) did not go in for this fantastic stuff. This has been the case with most of the mags I have read of a similar nature to F.F.M., and I have read plenty of them. But since I saw those letters, I've come to the conclusion that F.F.M. must be in a class by itself. It must be good, to get feminine readers.

I enjoyed A. Merritt's "Burn, Witch, Burn!" immensely although I wasn't satisfied with the ending because of the uncertainty it tended to leave in my mind of the actuality of the seemingly supernatural occurrences in it. "Beyond the Pole," in the same issue was just fair.

Virgil Finlay gets better and better all the time. He overdid himself in his illustrations for "Burn, Witch, Burn!", and his drawings for "Serapion," by Francis Stevens, in the July issue were just as good. I've often wondered how long it takes Mr. Finlay to complete a drawing; he puts so much life-like detail in it. I liked "Serapion" a lot better than I did your feature novel, "Polaris—of the Snows." I have a leaning toward the weird and macabre type of fantasy and any other just comes last on the list.

I wish Finlay could do all the illustrations for you. On second thought I wouldn't mind seeing the work of Hannes Bok in your pages.

I think that everyone will agree with me that your practice of giving us reprints is a great thing. It provides us younger and less fortunate readers with a chance to partake of

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the old "classics," the really great stories. I've read so much hackneyed tripe in the many competitive mags on the market at the present time, that when I come across a good story such as old-timers could give us, I am overwhelmed with joy.

Here are a few things I would like to see come to pass. Above all I want you to reprint at least one, if not all of the "Skylark" series by E. E. Smith, Ph.D. Although this series is really science-fiction, it can be placed in the category of fantasy because of the fantastic and imaginative scale of super-cosmic science that threads throughout. I think every reader of F.F.M. would put in their vote for a reprint of the "Skylark" stories. How about all you fans adding your request for Smith's unforgettable classics to mine? It is interesting to note that "The Skylark of Space," Smith's first story of the series, appears on almost every science-fiction fan's list of the ten best s-f classics of all time.

Secondly, a reprint of A. Merritt's "The Moon Pool," and "The Ship of Ishtar" would seem like food from the gods. I cannot express the avid yearning I have for these stories.

I am glad to hear that you are going to give us "Seven Footprints to Satan" in a future issue. I once read part of this story in an old "Argosy," but I didn't get to read all of it. From what I read I gathered that it was an excellent story

Here's a note to fellow readers. Who can supply me with a copy of F.F.M. containing Merritt's tale, "The Face in the Abyss"? I would be willing to trade mags for it. I have all kinds, including: S-F, fantasy, weird or otherwise.

Now, sirs, here is one criticism with which I want to penetrate your almost impregnable barriers of outstanding achievement. Please do not print any more stories like the G. A. England trilogy. I read the last part of the trilogy, "The Afterglow," but not the other two. If they were like "The Afterglow," I don't want any of them. There was so much mushy love-stuff in it, that I couldn't tell whether I was reading fantasy or a stage presentation of "Romeo and Juliet." I'm sure that in real life, the relations between a man and woman in the condition of the two main characters in "The Afterglow," would be quite different. Not so stilted and formal—not so much attention paid to conventionalities. I do say, though, that a love interest is an important part of a good story, but it shouldn't be played up in every paragraph.

As a parting reminder, by all means keep Virgil Finlay on the covers and interior drawings, and Abraham Merritt on the stories. And by the way, how about reprinting some of H. P. Lovecraft's stories, such as: "The Dunwich Horror," and "The Call of Cthulhu"?

TONY RAINES.

c/o J. W. GARRETT,
R.F.D. No. 1,
BRINKMAN, OKLA.

MERRITT FAN

Congratulations! Not only do I get a story by the incomparable Merritt in your latest issue of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES, (June) but also the very encouraging news that I can buy the heretofore unobtainable gems of classics in the fantasy field each month from now on. Please give us "Ship of Ishtar," and "The Moon Pool" in one issue, in the very near future.

There is no author whose works are closer to pure fantasy than the wonderfully descriptive Merritt. Couldn't you try to get him to finish those three novels that he had started before he dropped from the writing field?

Any of the famous novels that you have given us in the past was cheap at your new price of 25c, so I don't think that you have anything to worry about on that score. Just keep giving us as good stories as in the past and your work will make any other fantastic magazine seem small in comparison.

I have extra copies of the Sept.-Oct. 1939, Dec. 1939, Nov. 1939, and May-June 1940 issues for anyone unlucky enough to have missed them

ROBERT E. ROACH.

1252 WEST 80TH ST.,
CHICAGO, ILL.

WANTS MORE OLD-TIMERS

I should like to add my two cents worth to your list of reader's viewpoints. How about some old-timers like the Mars series of Edgar Rice Burroughs? The Chessmen of Mars, etc. Also "The Ship of Ishtar", "The Land that Time Forgot", "Son of Madame Butterfly", "The Cave Girl", etc.

ELIZABETH WILLIAM.

1014 W. 37TH ST.,
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

"ISHTAR" REQUESTED

I want to thank you for your superlative magazine. I'm a comparative newcomer to the ranks of Fantasy fans, therefore your mag brings new horizons for me to conquer. I like best of the stories I've read in it, "The Blind Spot" and second best, "The Citadel of Fear."

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I read "Polaris—of the Snows" at one sitting and thought it was better than "The Radio Planet" but it couldn't come up to "Burn. Witch, Burn!" which although it is not one of Merritt's best efforts was still very good.

Maybe one of your readers has a copy of "The Moon Pool" in book form which he will sell me.

I want to put in a plea for Merritt's "Ship of Ishtar." I already have it, but I know the fans would enjoy reading it. I'm also in favor of printing "The Moon Pool" and its sequel in a single volume.

Well, until you give us some out of print Kline, Burroughs, and Taine—

Yours,

JOE HENSLEY.

411 S. FESS,
BLOOMINGTON, IND.

ABOUT SEQUELS

Once more I feel called upon to express my opinion. This time it is in answer to the letter in the July issue of F. F. M. from Mr. Thomas Ryan, Jr.

I personally consider the "Blind Spot" as a classic of imaginative fiction. I wish Mr. Ryan would write and tell me, either through this department or a personal letter, in what way the "Spot" stories were unacceptable to him.

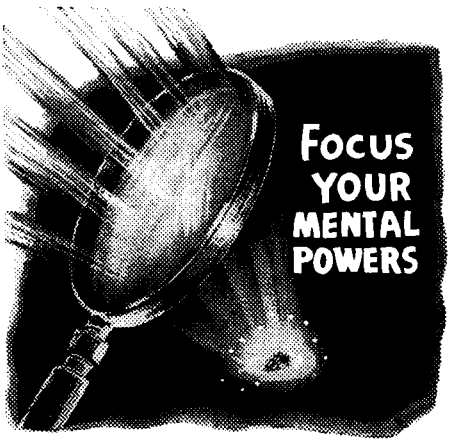
I am destitute. I can not buy, beg, borrow or, steal the November, 1939, issue of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES for the purpose of completing my file of F. F. M. and F. N. I wonder if one of my fellow fans can be persuaded to relinquish a copy? I will gladly pay them anything with in reason.

Now for a question or two. Are there any stories due to be reprinted by either Austin Hall or Homer Eon Flint? I prefer them as a team although either one of them can write a superb story. Question two. Would it be possible to have the sequels follow closer to the initial story in any given series? As it is you have us waiting impatiently for the follow-up in more than three series, *ie;* "The Mouthpiece of Zitu", "The Radio Menace", "Into the Infinite" and now "Minos of Sardanes". I think it would be a more satisfactory plan to complete one series before starting a new one. An independent story or two in between would be acceptable but not the start of a new series. Question three. Couldn't you use smaller print or a few more pages or both and run the extremely long stories complete in one issue?

Let me take this chance to thank you for giving us both the increased size and the trimmed edges. The increase in price is in keeping with present day conditions and the fans, I am sure, will not object to the slight additional charge. The quality of the stories we are receiving is well worth double the price you are asking. Wishing F. F. M. a long and successful life,

EUGENE W. ALBRIGHT.

602 WALNUT AVE.,
FAIRMONT. W. VA.



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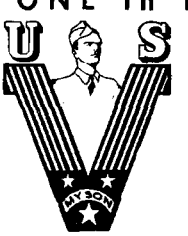

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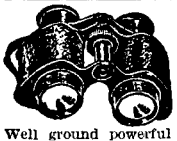

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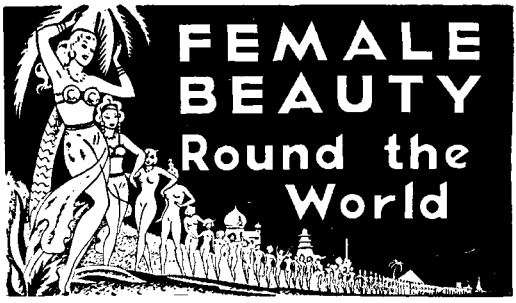

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